

# TINTORETTO



*Eric Newton*



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No great artist has the same meaning for different generations. Ruskin may fairly claim to have discovered Tintoretto for the nineteenth century, but, as Mr Newton says, "the eyes of the 1850's are not the same as those of the 1950's", and in this important work Mr Newton attempts a full-scale re-interpretation of this passionately prolific and disturbingly original artist in terms of our own times. The book deals with the known facts of Tintoretto's life, his strange character, his volcanic output, his derivations, his technical methods and his influence, which was never negligible though sometimes disastrous. It is also part of Mr Newton's thesis to suggest that Tintoretto, far from being a Mannerist, was the forerunner of Baroque art. By tackling an entirely new set of pictorial problems he led the way to Rubens and Rembrandt.

The dating of Tintoretto's paintings has always baffled art historians. Documentary evidence is scarce and the painter's stylistic development is erratic and often misleading. The author's wife, who has made a close study of Renaissance costume, has contributed an Appendix on the possibilities of dating the paintings from the evidence of costume and hair-dressing. This is an important addition to an extremely interesting and authoritative work.

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TINTORETTO

*By the same Author*

THE MEANING OF BEAUTY

IN MY VIEW

AN INTRODUCTION TO EUROPEAN PAINTING



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Sketch for the Capture of San Rocco

*Private Collection, London*

# TINTORETTO

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ERIC NEWTON



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## PREFACE

UNTIL the publication by the Phaidon Press of Hans Tietze's *Tintoretto* in 1949, no large-scale book on Tintoretto had been published in English since Osmaston's two-volume *The Art and Genius of Tintoret* of 1915. Before that date Holborn (1907) and Miss Phillips (1911) had published studies of him. Doubtless they, in their turn, owed much of their stimulus to certain passages on Tintoretto in Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *Stones of Venice*, which are among the most enthusiastic, though perhaps not the most revealing, in the vast body of his writing on art.

Abroad, Tintoretto has been admirably served by critics and art historians. Baron von Hadeln has collected and annotated the relevant contemporary documents and has edited the writings of Tintoretto's earliest biographer, Carlo Ridolfi. Mary Pittaluga's *Tintoretto* (1924) contains a long analysis of Tintoretto's style and an invaluable catalogue of documents. Luigi Coletti's *Il Tintoretto* (1944) discusses the chronology of the pictures with intelligence and understanding. Professor Ridolfo Palluchini's *La Giovinezza del Tintoretto*, published in 1950, contains a detailed discussion of Tintoretto's early works and a valuable essay on Mannerist influences in Venice.

In Germany Thode's *Tintoretto*, published in 1901, is still the solid base from which later writers have ventured further. The two-volume work of E. von der Bercken and A. L. Meyer (1923) has been republished in one volume (1942) and rewritten by von der Bercken alone. It contains an interesting analysis of the iconography of the Scuola of San Rocco paintings.

Still another book on an artist who has already claimed the attention of so many serious writers therefore needs an apology, especially since it aims neither at completeness on the one hand nor at brevity on the other. The limitations of the present volume

had better be stated at once. I have virtually ignored Tintoretto as a portrait painter, and I have paid relatively little attention to the paintings outside Venice.

The first omission is due to my inability to think Tintoretto a great or even an interesting portrait painter. A handful of his portraits—notably the Morosini in the National Gallery—seem to me magnificent. The bulk of them are surely mediocre; Tintoretto had neither the interest in individual human beings that explains the profundity of Rembrandt's or the intimacy of Goya's portraits, nor the respect for personages that gives Titian his power to ennoble the individual human being. He was essentially a master of mood, an interpreter of *happenings* and especially of the larger dramatic implications of those happenings. Given a sufficiently interesting theme, no canvas was ever too vast for him to fill: the greater the challenge the more passionately his imagination rose to meet it. But the challenge of the single individual divorced from a situation and isolated from an environment was one that he could not meet. To have catalogued his many sitters and recounted his comparative failure to make them interesting would have bored my readers.

My cavalier treatment of the Tintoretts that have found their way to galleries and private collections in Spain, Germany, America and elsewhere needs more apology. I have had little opportunity of looking at them since the moment when, three years ago, I found that I was seeing Tintoretto with new eyes. Up to that moment I had regarded the two mythologies in the National Gallery as delightful and dynamic variations on a familiar Venetian formula, the four Antecollegio pictures in the Ducal Palace as exceptional works of genius which bore little relation to the rest of his work, and the bulk of his paintings in Venice, especially the wall pictures in the Scuola of San Rocco, as gloomy and rather forbidding samples of early Baroque rhetoric.

I am now thoroughly ashamed of this superficial view, and this book is partly an attempt to make amends for it. But an act of repentance is a private concern. No author is justified in inflicting himself on his readers merely because he has experienced a change of heart. Yet I feel that rather more than a change of heart is involved. To say that the time is ripe for a revaluation of Tintoretto would be pompous: to say that another swing of the pendulum

of fashion is beginning to present him to us in a new light sounds trivial but is nearer the mark.

To be quite frank, my new sense of Tintoretto's importance had at first no more basis than a feeling that in his way of expressing form there was a strange resemblance to the work of Henry Moore. The resemblance, once one has noticed it, is striking though perhaps superficial, but when the eye begins to make such connections with contemporary art it is a symptom that the pendulum of fashion is beginning to swing and that a new orientation of values is beginning to take place. All kinds of little corroborative symptoms occurred. I found, for example, to my surprise, that I was beginning to be a little bored by the small-scale exquisiteness of the Church of the Miracoli in Venice, and by the steadiness, the precision and the tenderness of Piero della Francesca. Not that the second half of the fifteenth century was becoming, to me, less significant, but that its significance was changing. It was no longer an exquisite moment that preceded periods of ripeness, overripeness and decline, but a necessary preparation for a new kind of vision that reached its peak in the following century. Such symptoms of the fading of an old love and the dawn of a new one are always a little alarming. One automatically resists them, suspecting a temporary enthusiasm or a transient mood, but when they persist one succumbs in the end.

An art critic needs no excuse for analysing his affections. That is his proper occupation. What previous critics have said does not render superfluous what he has to say. He no more competes with other critics than an artist with his fellow artists. Ruskin, for all his eloquence and penetration, cannot utter the final word, for the eyes of the 1950's are not the same as those of the 1850's. If I am right in thinking that Tintoretto has something to say to my own generation which he did not say to previous generations, then I need not apologize too humbly for tackling an old theme.

Tintoretto baffles the categorist. The High Renaissance in Italy was a perilous moment of perfection that could not be prolonged. Its later phases suffered from the symptoms of restlessness and ultimate decay that inevitably follow a moment of perfection; it could not develop, for perfection creates its own cul-de-sac. Until comparatively recently that period of restlessness had no name: it became necessary to invent the term 'Mannerism' in



order to fill the gap between the end of the High Renaissance and the recognizable emergence of Baroque art. It is a useful term, and Wölfflin, attempting to analyse the essential difference between High Renaissance and Baroque, might have focused his acute eye even more sharply on evidences of transition had it been available forty years ago.

Nevertheless, it is a dangerous term. Art historians have not always resisted the temptation to apply the adjective 'Mannerist' to any artist who fits conveniently into the uneasy period between the completion of Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment' and the emergence of Rubens's mature style in painting or of Bernini's in sculpture. Tintoretto in particular has suffered by being thrust, rather recklessly, into the Mannerist category. What is more serious, art history has also suffered. When an artist of exceptional power and manifest genius is exhibited under a new generic label, his personal characteristics tend to be accepted as typical of the new genus. To call Tintoretto a Mannerist is to twist the meaning of the word so violently that it begins to require a new definition. The original concept, which so usefully fitted Vasari, Bronzino, Parmigiano, Pordenone and their like, will fit them no longer if Tintoretto is the arch-Mannerist.

I am convinced that to think of Tintoretto as a Mannerist at all is both to misunderstand him and to deprive a useful term of much of its meaning. One purpose of this book is to rescue Tintoretto from the reckless categorist and to suggest that he, at least, managed to short-circuit straight from High Renaissance to Baroque: that he was unaffected—or only superficially affected—by that uneasy interlude through which lesser men found it necessary to pass: and that, as early as 1548, he was solving a set of problems that were not generally understood until the first decade of the seventeenth century.

No author can write a book without falling into debt to numerous persons who have helped him with suggestions or information or encouragement or tiresome scraps of delegated work. Such a collective debt can only be discharged by collective thanks; but I owe special thanks to my wife for temporarily abandoning her work on the development of fifteenth-century costume in order to write the appendix on the dating of certain of Tintoretto's paintings on the evidence of costume and hairdressing.

Such an appendix is particularly necessary in the case of an artist whose stylistic development is notoriously inconsistent and baffling. Experts on Tintoretto vary by as much as forty years in the dating of certain of his paintings. Yet it seems obvious that when an artist, however exuberant his imagination, almost invariably depicts a world inhabited by men and women wearing the dress of his own contemporaries, and as even nudes can be dated to the extent that hairdressing can be dated, it should be possible to date his pictures within close limits—provided enough is known about (i) the actual hairdressing and costumes fashionable in each year of the sixteenth century and the speed at which the fashion changed, and (ii) Tintoretto's personal attitude towards the costume of his period and his own habitual stylizations of it.

The appendix is based on a detailed study of both subjects, each providing, as it were, a check on the other. No attempt has been made to arrive at a closer dating than our existing knowledge of the costume of the sixteenth century would justify. But in certain cases, even to date a picture to within a decade on internal evidence is enough to show how unreliable the art historian's instinct for stylistic development can be in Tintoretto's case. To assign to 1550 a painting that depicts clothes that were not worn till 1570 is to credit Tintoretto with prophetic powers of a kind unknown in art history.





# CONTENTS

PREFACE	<i>page</i> v
PART I	
1. THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CRISIS	3
2. FIRST STEPS	11
3. THE INSPIRED ECLECTIC	24
4. INNOVATIONS	37
5. EARLY YEARS AND PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT	52
PART II	
6. THE FORMATIVE DECADE, 1545-55	73
7. 1556-JUNE 1564	91
8. THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO: THE ALBERGO, MAY 1564-NOVEMBER 1566	112
9. THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO: THE UPPER HALL, 1575-81	123
10. THE CHURCH OF SAN ROCCO	140
11. THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO: THE LOWER HALL, 1583-7	151
12. 1566-86	163
13. THE DUCAL PALACE AND MOSAIC CARTOONS	180
14. THE PARADISO AND LAST PAINTINGS	197
15. CONCLUSION	207
APPENDIX: DATING ON THE EVIDENCE OF COSTUME AND HAIRDRESSING, BY STELLA MARY PEARCE	215
SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY	234
PAINTINGS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT	235
INDEX	243



## PLATES

### *Frontispiece*

*Sketch for the Capture of San Rocco*      Private Collection, London

### *At the end of the book*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. <i>Apollo and Marsyas</i>                              | Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford,<br>Connecticut  |
| 2. <i>The Last Supper</i>                                 | Church of San Marcuola                        |
| 3. <i>The Miracle of the Slave</i>                        | Accademia                                     |
| 4. <i>The Crucifixion</i>                                 | Accademia                                     |
| 5. <i>The Temptation of Adam</i>                          | Accademia                                     |
| 6. <i>Susanna and the Elders</i>                          | Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna              |
| 7. <i>Venus and Vulcan</i>                                | Pinakothek, Munich                            |
| 8. <i>Sketch for Venus and Vulcan</i>                     | Neues Museum, Wiesbaden                       |
| 9. <i>The Adoration of the Magi (detail)</i>              | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 10. <i>Drawing by Henry Moore</i>                         |   |
| 11. <i>The Crucifixion (detail)</i>                       | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 12. <i>Twelfth-century Mosaics (detail)</i>               | Basilica of San Marco                         |
| 13. <i>The Massacre of the Innocents (detail)</i>         | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 14. <i>The Miracle of the Slave (detail)</i>              | Accademia                                     |
| 15. <i>The Deposition</i>                                 | Accademia                                     |
| 16. <i>The Marriage at Cana</i>                           | Santa Maria della Salute                      |
| 17. <i>The Presentation of the Virgin</i>                 | Madonna dell' Orto                            |
| 18. <i>The Last Judgment (lower half)</i>                 | Madonna dell' Orto                            |
| 19. <i>The Worship of the Golden Calf</i><br>(lower half) | Madonna dell' Orto                            |
| 20. <i>Finding the Body of St. Mark</i>                   | Brera, Milan                                  |
| 21. <i>Removal of the Body of St. Mark</i>                | Accademia                                     |
| 22. <i>The Last Supper</i>                                | Church of San Trovaso                         |
| 23. <i>The Last Supper</i>                                | Church of San Polo                            |
| 24. <i>The Crucifixion (detail)</i>                       | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 25. <i>The Crucifixion (detail)</i>                       | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 26. <i>The Crucifixion</i>                                | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 27. <i>Interior of Upper Hall</i>                         | Scuola of San Rocco                           |
| 28. <i>The Temptation of Adam</i>                         | Ceiling of Upper Hall, Scuola of<br>San Rocco |

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 29. <i>San Rocco in Glory</i>  | Ceiling of the Albergo, Scuola of San Rocco |
| 30. <i>The Baptism (detail)</i>  | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 31. <i>The Gathering of Manna (detail)</i>                                     | San Giorgio Maggiore                        |
| 32. <i>The Temptation of Christ</i>  | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 33. <i>The Agony in the Garden</i>   | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 34. <i>San Rocco Visiting the Plague-stricken in Hospital</i>                  | Church of San Rocco                         |
| 35. <i>San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison</i>                           | Church of San Rocco                         |
| 36. <i>The Nativity</i>  | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 37. <i>The Ascension</i>   | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 38. <i>The Baptism</i>   | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 39. <i>The Last Supper</i>   | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 40. <i>The Annunciation</i>  | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 41. <i>The Flight into Egypt</i>   | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 42. <i>The Healing of the Paralytic</i>  | Church of San Rocco                         |
| 43. <i>The Visitation</i>  | Scuola of San Rocco                         |
| 44. <i>The Temptation of St. Anthony</i>                                       | Church of San Trovaso                       |
| 45. <i>Christ in the House of Martha and Mary</i>                              | Pinakothek, Munich                          |
| 46. <i>St. Ursula and the Virgins</i>  | Church of San Lazzaro                       |
| 47. <i>The Miracle of St. Agnes</i>  | Madonna dell' Orto                          |
| 48. <i>The Origin of the Milky Way</i>   | National Gallery, London                    |
| 49. <i>St. George and the Dragon</i>   | National Gallery, London                    |
| 50. <i>The Finding of Moses (panel)</i>  | Prado, Madrid                               |
| 51. <i>The Nine Muses</i>  | Hampton Court, London                       |
| 52. <i>The Last Supper (detail)</i>  | San Giorgio Maggiore                        |
| 53. <i>The Last Supper (detail)</i>  | San Giorgio Maggiore                        |
| 54. <i>The Forge of Vulcan</i>   | Ducal Palace                                |
| 55. <i>Bacchus and Ariadne</i>   | Ducal Palace                                |
| 56. <i>The Three Graces</i>  | Ducal Palace                                |
| 57. <i>Venus, Mars and Minerva</i>   | Ducal Palace                                |
| 58. <i>The Emperor creating Gian Francesco Gonzaga first Marquis of Mantua</i> | Pinakothek, Munich                          |
| 59. <i>The Capture of Parma</i>  | Pinakothek, Munich                          |
| 60. <i>The Battle of Zara (detail)</i>   | Ducal Palace                                |
| 61. <i>Paradiso (mosaic)</i>   | Church of San Marco                         |
| 62. <i>Venice Enthroned</i>  | Ducal Palace                                |
| 63. <i>Sketch for Paradiso</i>   | Louvre, Paris                               |
| 64. <i>Paradiso</i>  | Ducal Palace                                |
| 65. <i>Paradiso (detail)</i>   | Ducal Palace                                |



66. <i>Paradiso</i> (detail)	Ducal Palace
67. <i>The Capture of St. Catherine</i>	Accademia
68. <i>St. Catherine and the Wheels</i>	Accademia
69. <i>The Last Supper</i>	San Giorgio Maggiore
70. <i>The Gathering of Manna</i>	San Giorgio Maggiore
71. <i>The Entombment</i>	San Giorgio Maggiore
72. <i>Drawing for The Worship of the Golden Calf</i>	Uffizi Gallery, Florence
73. <i>Male Figure in Action</i>	Uffizi Gallery, Florence
74. <i>Drawing for The Battle of Zara</i>	Uffizi Gallery, Florence
75. <i>Carving of Tintoretto by F. Pianta</i>	Scuola of San Rocco
76. <i>Entry in the Minute Books of the</i>	Scuola of San Rocco

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## PART I





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## Chapter One

### THE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY CRISIS

EVERY period in history is transitional. Each generation is the inevitable product of the environment provided for it by the previous generation and exerts an inevitable influence on the generation that succeeds it. Every link in the historical chain is firmly attached to the link that precedes and follows it, so that historians, looking back along a foreshortened section of the chain are bound to see it as something homogeneous—a consistent pattern capable of changes that are often surprising but never capricious. Prophesying, as historians must do, after the event, it is always possible to explain the changes. Surprising though they often were, they were also inevitable. Given the soil, the seed, and the climate the plant was bound to grow just so; its leaves and flowers may have been—indeed *had* to be—different in shape and colour from any that had been seen in the world before. Yet the difference was predetermined.

Of all historians the art historian is, perhaps, the most acutely aware of this series of inevitable transitions out of which the pattern of development is made. For works of art form ideal laboratory specimens. They can be isolated, arranged chronologically, juxtaposed, compared. Unlike the uneasy tangle of social or political history which refuses to make sense until the historian has submitted it to a rigorous process of sifting, art history has a clarity imposed on it by the artists who furnish it with its raw material. What the art historian has to do is to discover the relationship between works of art. He is dealing with the creations of exceptional, not of average men; and his task is to bring to them the maximum understanding of which he is capable, and in doing so, to disentangle the spirit of the artist from the spirit of his age: to discover and define just how much the artist owed to his age and to what extent his age was indebted to him.

But if all ages and consequently all artists are transitional, as they must be if the word 'development' is to have any meaning at all, there are certainly many different kinds of transition. Changes do not always take place at the same rate. More important, they do not always follow the same direction. It is impossible not to think of art history as a pattern of rise and fall: words like 'primitive,' 'mature,' and 'decadent' cannot be avoided. There are times when a whole nation seems to be searching for a solution to a given problem, when one generation after another makes its contribution to the solution, until at last one feels it has been found. A short-lived moment of triumph arrives, a pause for the full exploitation of the new solution, then a strange hesitation and then a crisis. At that moment of crisis everything depends on the arrival of a new impetus, the discovery of another uncharted region. Without the new impetus, the new discovery, decadence is certain. With it, a new phase in art history can be inaugurated. And at that moment, the word 'transitional' acquires a more definite meaning. It implies not only a development but also a change of direction.

It was exactly at the beginning of one of those moments of crisis that Tintoretto was born, and it was exactly at the end of it, thirty years later, that he painted his first major masterpiece, *The Miracle of the Slave*, thereby forging one of the most remarkable and surprising links in the chain of art development. Certainly he was, in his own right, an exceptionally powerful personality; but the timing of his arrival was as important as his genius. Born fifteen years earlier, he would have been caught up in the swift stream of maturing Venetian tradition: fifteen years later, decadence would already have set in and not even he could have stopped it. In either case he would have been a considerable figure, but had *The Miracle of the Slave* been painted in 1520 it would have been no more than an extension of something already accomplished by Titian; painted in 1570 it would have been an elaborate piece of mannerist rhetoric. I do not claim that Tintoretto saved Venetian painting from eventual decay, but he postponed its fate for over half a century and he enabled it, before its end, to pass on to the rest of Europe a new manifestation of the human spirit. He laid the foundation for the baroque masterpieces of the following century. Venetian art, because of him, enjoyed a longer life, died

a nobler death, and established a more assured future for its progeny. It was not by accident that in the praise of his contemporaries one detects a puzzled, grudging note and that the first writer who really understood his achievement was Marco Boschini in the second half of the seventeenth century.

The crisis that occurred in Italian art between 1520 and 1550 was not a simple one. Nor can it have been apparent to those whom it overtook. The death, in 1492, of Lorenzo the Magnificent brought the enlightened patronage of the Medici family to an end and drove the whole of Florentine art into virtual exile. Rome succeeded to Florence, Pope Julius II replaced Lorenzo as the primary stimulus. At first the change seemed entirely beneficial. Florentine fresco painters did, in fact, rise to the splendid occasion when they were asked to attack the great wall spaces of the Vatican. In the first decade of the sixteenth century, Michelangelo, working on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, and Raphael, on the great lunettes of the Papal apartments, seemed more gigantic and more fertile than they had ever been before. Yet, as it turned out, theirs was the swan song of Tuscan painting. Rome made the wrong kind of demands on them. Tuscan finesse and intellectual discipline were not exportable. Instead of virility combined with delicacy, Rome needed power wedded to grandiosity. Raphael died under the strain, in 1520. His last big painting, the *Transfiguration*, became a model for the mannerism that succeeded his death. When Ruskin wrote that his impression of it was that everyone was pointing at someone and that nobody was worth pointing at he did less than justice to its wonderfully complex organization but he accurately described its rather empty rhetoric. Michelangelo began to experiment with sculpture of such profundity and intimacy that it could have no place in Rome; and when, thirty years after the Sistine ceiling was finished, he returned to the same building to paint the *Last Judgment*, the old vitality had left him. He was still a giant, but a giant in exile. That stupendous organization of pensive titans that covers the west wall of the Sistine Chapel is, to the art historian, a melancholy spectacle, for he sees only too clearly how it stands at the edge of an abyss into which Michelangelo himself never fell, but in which all his successors were lost.

The story of the Romano-Tuscan mannerists is not a happy one.

No one to-day can watch the muscular writhings and posturings of these doomed artists without a sinking of the spirit. They are in the grip of the Michelangelesque formula, and they are strangled by it. Their only chance of survival was to escape from Rome and the titanism that Rome imposed on them.

In Venetian painting the crisis occurred twenty years later and was less disheartening than the Romano-Tuscan crisis. Throughout the second half of the fifteenth century the course of Venetian painting had developed with an easy, aristocratic magnificence. The pace was set by Giovanni Bellini who, during each year of his later life, pushed the possibilities of painting a little further away from his own early asceticism and a little nearer to the sensuous, languorous ideal which, at the moment when the Sistine Chapel ceiling was finished, must have seemed the final goal of Venetian painting. Behind Bellini, a little crowd of lesser men, conservative painters, ready to exploit his successes, but incapable of experimenting by his side, added its weight to the school—Carpaccio, Montagna, Alvis Vivarini, Basaiti, Cima, and the rest. It is an orderly army of distinguished men following a greater leader, very different from the army of Florentine painters of the second half of the fifteenth century, the experimentalists who had no leader but prepared the way for the advent of the High Renaissance.

When the aged Giovanni painted his last picture *The Feast of the Gods*, the most lyrical and sensuous—the most pastorally Venetian picture—he had ever conceived, and left it incomplete in 1514, there was still no break in that continuity. Bellini's ex-pupil, Titian, finished it, or, at least, added to its landscape background, as naturally as if he had been finishing off a pair of shoes started by another cobbler. When Titian and Giorgione took over from Giovanni, there was no sense of the dawn of a new era or the end of an old one. Venice slid almost imperceptibly into *her* High Renaissance. Titian's early paintings carry the tradition straight on without a change of direction. They intensify but do not alter the spirit of the later Bellini. There is no crisis here.

But within a year or two the parallel with the Roman crisis develops. Giorgione, like Raphael, dies at the very moment when he has reached full maturity, followed, six years later, in 1516, by Giovanni himself. Titian is left, like Michelangelo, in sole charge



of the destiny of his school, with a reputation that developed, during the next twenty-five years, into a legend. This was the true moment of the Venetian High Renaissance. Had Titian died in 1545 instead of thirty years later, his reputation as a painter of noble, lovable pictures would hardly suffer. What one thinks of as the climax of Venetian painting—the final and perfect solution of the Belliniesque problem—had been reached before the end of the first half of the century. Yet Titian lived on, and after passing through a curious, but brief phase, in the fifteen-forties, when he seemed, himself, to be on the point of becoming a Mannerist, launched himself adventurously into a new artistic life. His pictures became profound rather than lovable: the well-known Venetian noble sensuousness became troubled and tragic. The change between the early and the late Titian was as great, but not as melancholy, as the change between the ceiling and the west wall of the Sistine Chapel. But since it came just too late to affect Tintoretto's art it does not concern us here.

What does concern us is that in the year of Tintoretto's birth, the Tuscan tradition had passed its zenith and was beginning dangerously to run downhill: and that during his formative period, before his first masterpiece had been painted, Venetian art had achieved perfection: that there was no one but Titian to take the next step: and that he, knowing that he had arrived at the ultimate destination envisaged by Bellini, began to explore new country that was perhaps more Titianesque than ever, but was certainly less Venetian.

In the Accademia at Venice, two huge canvases hang opposite to each other. On one side is Titian's last picture, his final message and in many ways his most potent, the dark and mysterious *Pietà*—finished, appropriately enough, by Palma, just as Titian himself, sixty years earlier, had finished Bellini's last picture. On the other side is Tintoretto's *Miracle of the Slave*, vivid, crisp, furiously energetic, the first full statement of the new point of view. Twenty-seven years separate the young man's first masterpiece from the old man's last. Titian, in 1575, had no more to say; Tintoretto, in 1548, had hardly decided what to say. He only knew it could not be said in Titian's way. The Titian of 1548 had reached the end of a cul-de-sac. If he had died in that year, leaving unfinished one of his opulent canvases of the period—say the *Venus and the*

*Organ Player*—Tintoretto would certainly not have been in the mood to finish it for him.

In this way the two main traditions of Italian Renaissance painting reached their moment of crisis after their moment of perfection. I doubt if the most acute contemporary observer realized clearly what had happened. Tintoretto himself may have felt it intuitively, but the two great art publicists of the time, Vasari who spoke for Florence and Pietro Aretino who made it his task to praise Venetian art, show no sign of knowing that they are celebrating the end of an epoch. Even here the parallel between the Tuscan and the Venetian temperament is close. Both men are jealous of the cause they have espoused, but Vasari's solid, intelligent prejudice is typically Florentine. He chooses the medium of biography. Aretino's prejudice is passionate, scandalous, unscrupulous. He is thoroughly Venetian and the less formal medium of letters—obviously designed for publication—suits him admirably.

In the same year in which the *Miracle of the Slave* was finished and delivered to the Scuola of San Marco, Paolo Pino published in Venice his *Dialogo di Pittura*, an essay on painting in the form of a conversation between two up-to-date young men of the time. Lauro is a Venetian, Fabio a Tuscan. Both are painters and both are enthusiasts, but there is no sense of opposition and very little of rivalry between the two. They are concerned with formulating the principles of painting, and having decided (they are apt to mix their categories in a way that bewilders the critic of to-day) that the three major factors are design, imagination, and colour, they begin to examine particular cases. Titian and Michelangelo are, for both of them, beyond criticism, but Fabio puts in a significant plea for Bronzino. The dialogue runs as follows:

FABIO. But if Bronzino goes on improving [he was forty-five years old when Pino wrote] he will become a most excellent painter and I venture to say in my opinion he is the best colourist of our time.

LAURO. Bronzino is a skilful artist. I like his way of working and I recognize his qualities, but I find Titian more satisfying: and if Titian and Michelangelo could inhabit a single body: if the colour of Titian could be added to the design of Michelangelo, we should then have the supreme god of painting, seeing that each of them is already a god in his own sphere.

Pino's *Dialogo* was published exactly a century before Carlo

Ridolfi's life of Tintoretto. Ridolfi's oft-quoted remark that Tintoretto inscribed on the wall of one of his rooms: "Il disegno di Michel Angelo e'l colorito di Titiano" is therefore by no means the first indication that contemporary artists were looking for a way out of the impasse created by the High Renaissance in Italy. Ridolfi does not mention the date when Tintoretto adopted the motto, but even as early as 1540 it cannot have been particularly original. The theory of eclecticism—the notion of perfecting style by combining the elements of previous styles—was very much in the air in the 1540's. Lauro would assuredly have acknowledged the source of his notion of combining the Titianesque with the Michelangelesque if Tintoretto had invented, or had already adopted the famous motto. He was already known as a promising young painter. Pino includes him in a list of nineteen living artists, calling him "Giacobo Tintore"—evidently the nickname Tintoretto had not yet been universally accepted—and Aretino had, two years earlier, written a eulogistic though faintly patronizing letter about the *Apollo and Marsyas* which he had commissioned as a decoration for his own house in Venice.

Tintoretto's problem, therefore, was not his own personal problem. It was the problem of his whole generation. It is, of course, in a greater or lesser degree the problem of every sensitive young artist in every generation, though each generation states it in different terms. The early work of even the most furiously personal of painters is full of echoes. Artists arrive at their individual styles not by searching their own hearts for a means of expressing their vision but by imitating, consciously or unconsciously, the work of the men they admire and then by gradually shedding the borrowed clothing as they become more and more conscious of its inadequacy. But throughout the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries the *bottega* system made it inevitable that each young apprentice should openly adopt the manner of his master. What was new in Pino's dialogue and in Tintoretto's motto was the notion that styles could be thought of as ingredients in a recipe: that they could be deliberately adopted rather than unconsciously absorbed. Pino and Tintoretto may not have been aware that a crisis in the development of painting had occurred, but their attitude of mind was one which could only be adopted in a crisis.

Pino's dialogue is far more significant of the new spirit than

Tintoretto's motto, for Pino was thinking in general terms and discussing the normal attitude of mind of the average artist of his time.

The term Mannerist, recently invented by art historians as a label for the transitional period between the end of the High Renaissance and the appearance of Baroque art in its more or less complete form, is not easy to define. Useful though the word is, there is a danger in applying it to a period rather than to an underlying spirit in painting. Pino's two young men discuss the art of painting from a very different point of view from the theorists of the preceding century. The latter were concerned with the imitation of natural appearances, Pino with the creation of masterpieces; and though both were in search of a formula the formulae they found were very different. Alberti would never have suggested that the secret of good painting was to combine the grace of Fra Angelico with the realism of Masaccio. Pino's formula is certainly that of a Mannerist.

If we define Mannerism as an attempt to isolate and exaggerate the manner of an earlier painter and to evolve a style from the scholarly study of style, we begin to understand why Pino's spokesmen chose Bronzino as the most promising artist of the younger generation. The strongest impression left behind by a typical Mannerist painting is that the artist has derived hardly anything direct from nature, but has absorbed, digested, and stylized the paintings of others. The result, as is well-known, is a kind of morbid pedantry not far removed from parody. It is valuable and revealing in that it is an accurate index of the attitude of the artists concerned towards their chosen heroes. Vasari, Parmigiano, Bronzino, Pordenone, taking their stimulus in varying degrees from Michelangelo, differ from each other only in that they concentrate on different aspects of their hero's style, and, in doing so, make it quite clear what Michelangelo meant to the generation that followed him. For them the problem of art could only be solved by studying art.

But for Tintoretto the problem was different. Despite the frequent echoes of Bonifazio, of Pordenone, of Parmigiano that one finds in his work, he was no Mannerist. One must turn to Ridolfi's biography to discover how the problem became, for him, an urgent one at an early date in his career.



## *Chapter Two*

### FIRST STEPS

NO writer on Tintoretto omits to quote Ridolfi's account of the young painter's short-lived apprenticeship in Titian's studio. 'A few days later, when Titian had returned home and entered the room where the students were, he saw some papers underneath a desk, and seeing certain figures drawn thereon, asked who had done them. Jacopo, who was their author, fearing he had done amiss, said timidly that they were by his hand. Whereupon Titian, foreseeing from such small beginnings that the lad would become a very able man and do him a certain amount of harm in his art, impatiently ordered Girolamo, his chief pupil (thus does the worm of jealousy affect the human heart) to forbid Jacopo the house. And so, without knowing why, he was left without a master.'

Ridolfi is a careless writer, and in the matter of dates he is rarely to be trusted. But he was in touch with Tintoretto's son Domenico; the story must have often been told in the Tintoretto household and it is certain, in its essence, to be true, even though Jacopo himself, in his old age, may have over-dramatized it, so that when it reached Ridolfi it had acquired a slightly boastful note. That Titian, at the height of his fame, would be jealous of a youth with no reputation at all, is unlikely. One can think of far more plausible explanations. Ridolfi's account of Tintoretto's temperament, his impulsiveness and impatience, his lack of what we think of as good breeding, his independence, together with his unconventional approach to draughtsmanship, are enough to account for the incident. Titian can have had no lack of pupils during the thirties—Ridolfi is vague about the date, but he describes the young Tintoretto as "fanciullo," a word no modern Italian would use to describe a boy of more than fourteen—and he could afford to discourage pupils, however brilliant, who would be likely to stir up trouble in the studio. Such incidents must have

occurred throughout the Renaissance. In fact strained relationship between the academic master and his brilliant pupil is a favourite theme of Renaissance legend. Titian was not academic nor did Tintoretto's earliest work suggest the advent of a rival. What matters in the story is not Titian's motive but the fact that a young man of genius was 'left without a master' in an age when the craft of painting could hardly be absorbed without one. To be a self-taught artist may not have been unique but it was abnormal. To have had no master was not only to have missed the chance of learning the routine of the craft: it had social implications as well. The contacts made in a studio belonging to an artist of Titian's eminence were bound to stand a pupil in good stead once he set up as an independent painter. From the moment when he was forbidden Titian's house, Tintoretto had to fight not only for his craftsmanship but also for his patrons. More than any other artist of his time he was a self-made man, and the consequences can be seen clearly enough both in his art and his conduct. His technical procedure is unorthodox. His stylistic development is different in kind from that of any of his predecessors and his way of conducting his business is startlingly unconventional.

Jacopo Robusti, son of Giovanni Battista Robusti, a dyer of silks, whose family came originally from Lucca, was born in Venice in the autumn of 1518. Of his mother all that is known is the fact, gathered from a letter from Jacopo to his brother Domenico, that she was still alive in 1553. Almost all that we know of Jacopo's life and character has to be sought for in Carlo Ridolfi's *Vita di G. Robusti detto il Tintoretto*, published in Venice in 1642, half a century after Tintoretto's death, and in contemporary documents which are surprisingly few and are mostly concerned with commissions or payments for paintings.

Ridolfi was an enthusiastic admirer, and his book, like all laudatory biographies, has to be read with caution. His main factual outline is certainly to be trusted though on points of detail he can be a little careless—he puts the date of Tintoretto's birth, for example, six years too early. On Tintoretto's character, too, he is surely to be trusted. The man he describes is certainly no mere type, though it would have been easy enough to paint a generalized picture of the dynamic, uneducated, solitary genius:

Ridolfi had enough first-hand information from Domenico, who had worked so closely and so long with his father, to fill in the kind of detail that distinguishes the individual from the type. On Tintoretto's methods of work he must be completely reliable. They are too strange and too individual for any biographer to have invented them. And they are exactly the kind of devices that a young man of infinite determination and energy would improvise as substitutes for the normal art education of his time. On his motives and the motives of those with whom he came into contact one senses a certain bias. Titian's alleged jealousy, for instance, does not ring true. One feels that Ridolfi has invented it as a means of absolving Tintoretto from blame, or from what he would have to interpret as blame. The inevitable clash of opposing temperaments between two men so different in age and outlook could certainly not be ignored; but when the elder of the two had an almost legendary authority and was universally regarded as the greatest artist of his generation, the younger must have appeared, in Ridolfi's eyes, to require an exceptionally vigorous defence. The modern biographer, with his more tolerant attitude to human conduct, would not think it necessary to speak of jealousy; 'incompatibility' would be his operative word.

Details about Tintoretto's early life are almost entirely lacking. Ridolfi records nothing prior to the incident of his dismissal from Titian's studio, beyond the fact that he showed early promise—children who do not are exceptional—and that he was encouraged by his parents to draw in charcoal and to use his father's dyes as colours. Nor was it unusual for a boy of thirteen or fourteen to be apprenticed to a famous painter. Up to the moment when he was taken to Titian's studio and ejected therefrom within ten days, there is no hint of anything beyond the usual routine followed by a promising boy who had made up his mind as to how he proposed to earn his living.

It is not easy, to-day, to imagine the state of mind of an artist of the early sixteenth century who found himself cut off from the indispensable first stage of his career. The modern student who finds he cannot obtain admission to an art school is certainly not in a parallel position. The sixteenth century had no conception of the untutored genius who gropes his way to a means of expression by a process of trial and error. To-day, one thinks of the artist's

imaginative equipment as his most precious possession: of his training as a tiresome necessity, and even, perhaps, a dangerous necessity since it may, by its very insistence on technical processes, hamper the natural growth of his creative force: and of his "style" as an inevitable product of his imagination, as the oak-tree is an inevitable product of the acorn.

In order to see Tintoretto's problem in contemporary terms, one would have to visualize a young man determined to become an aeronautical engineer who was forbidden access to a university, who could only obtain employment in an aeroplane factory as an unskilled labourer, who had only been given the briefest glimpse of the inside of the designing office, and who was not on speaking terms with the head designer. Such a young man would be in a difficult but not quite impossible position. He would certainly not console himself with the thought that a university degree and a course of training in the workshops would hamper the growth of his native genius by insisting too much on the tiresome details of aerodynamics or the practical problems of the workshop. He could still, and he certainly would, scrape acquaintance with men who had been given opportunities denied to him, in the hope of picking their brains: he would read all the available literature on his subject: and, as he mastered it by the sheer force of intelligence and will-power, he would develop a rather nervous anxiety to prove, at all costs, that a self-made scientist could hold his own in a highly competitive world. He would, in fact, have that mixture of superficial assertiveness, basic humility and reckless devotion to his work that we associate with the self-made man.

Such was certainly Tintoretto's temperament at the outset of his career. Of his own creative genius he was never in any doubt, but the word 'genius' had by no means the same connotations as it has to-day. Its existence, its dictionary meaning of a special natural endowment unaffected by and impervious to the artist's normal training in craftsmanship, were certainly recognized in the early sixteenth century, but it was still thought of as a quality that enabled an artist to rise above the level of his more pedestrian fellows, a desirable addition to his acquired abilities. To-day we regard it as the force without which a painter is not an artist at all, which alone gives meaning and direction to craftsmanship. Craftsmanship, to modern minds, is no more than the adequate means



evolved by genius for its own expression, a means to which genius itself can usually indicate a short cut.

That was not how the artists of the Italian Renaissance and High Renaissance regarded it. For them, painting was a complicated, technical process to which there was no short cut. Its traditions, handed on from studio to studio, could certainly be enlarged and even, within decent limits, revolutionized. But here was a young man denied the usual opportunities of absorbing them. No wonder he wrote, rather desperately, on the wall of his room: 'Il disegno di Michel Angelo e'l colorito di Titiano.' In much the same spirit one can imagine the thwarted but ambitious aeroplane designer of to-day adopting as his motto, "The speed of the fighter and the range of the bomber," and hoping that inspiration and enthusiasm, added to hard reading and an improvised workshop in his own home, would bring him the fame and success he craved. One can also imagine that in the improvised workshop, with no professional guidance and no patronizing smiles at the amateurish unconventionality of his methods, he might revolutionize aeroplane design, not by the power of his genius but by the unorthodox and empirical nature of his experiments.

This is exactly what happened. By the time Ridolfi wrote his life, Tintoretto's methods had ceased to be extraordinary. Ridolfi describes them in some detail as being original and unusual, but if he had been writing fifty years earlier he would probably have made them seem eccentric and a little ludicrous. Tintoretto, instead of learning traditional methods, was forced to invent new ones, not, as a modern artist would, out of dissatisfaction with the old régime, like Delacroix, or from a desire to get closer to nature like the Impressionists, but simply because there was nothing else for him to do. Every great innovator in art has grafted his own new ideas on to the vigorous stem of tradition. But Tintoretto was the first to begin from the beginning. He is as great an innovator, though not as great a revolutionary, as Giotto. As one studies his work one is constantly confronted with ways of thinking, ways of seeing, ways of feeling that cannot be traced to any known origin in the art of his predecessors. And one is constantly forced to the conclusion that his ways of thinking and feeling were largely based on ways of seeing which, in their turn, were suggested to him by the devices described by Ridolfi.



To us they sound simple enough. He studied, Ridolfi tells us, statues and casts of statues: in particular, he acquired Daniele da Volterra's models of Michelangelo's four recumbent figures in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence.<sup>1</sup> From these he made drawings by lamplight in charcoal, water-colour, and gouache, emphasizing the strong modelling which would naturally result from the use of artificial light, and choosing points of view which involved extreme foreshortening. The significance of this last will be seen later.

He knew well enough [says Ridolfi,] with his acute intelligence that it was necessary to make drawings from 'rilievi' and to avoid the strict imitation of nature which usually gives imperfect results because nature never succeeds in achieving equal beauty in all her parts. Tintoretto used to say that the best artists made an extract from nature, improving on her defective parts, so as to achieve perfection. He continually copied Titian's pictures, and based his manner of colouring on them, with the result that in the paintings of his maturity one can see the fruits of the careful observation of his years of study. By following in the footsteps of the best masters he reached perfection with rapid strides.

He set himself, moreover, to draw from the living model in all sorts of attitudes, which he endowed with a grace of movement, making endless rapid sketches. Sometimes he dissected corpses in order to study the arrangement of the muscles, in an attempt to unite his observation of sculpture with his study of nature, taking from the first its formal beauty [*la buona forma*], and from the second, unity and gentleness [*tenerezza*].

To anyone familiar with Renaissance theorizing, there is nothing new in the first part of Ridolfi's description. The general idea that art is an imitation of nature, but that where nature fails in 'beauty' the artist must remedy her defects, dates back to Alberti and the middle of the fifteenth century. Naturally the idea of what is 'beautiful' had shifted a good deal in the interval. Even in different parts of Italy at the same moment of time, opinions differed, as they always have done and always will about a quality which cannot be submitted to the arbitration of reason. Vasari found in Michelangelo, Aretino in Titian and Ridolfi in Tintoretto

<sup>1</sup> Ridolfi implies that Tintoretto possessed these models in his early youth, though they were not, in fact, available till 1557 when Tintoretto was thirty-nine years old.

the ideal exponents of precisely the same theory in painting. They could have quarrelled indefinitely on the two questions: (i) which of these three artists had best succeeded in copying nature, and (ii) which of them had most satisfactorily remedied the defects in nature by injecting 'beauty' into their work wherever there was a need to do so. But none of them would have abandoned the theory itself, and none of them would have disagreed as to the best way to apply it. For naturalism, draw from the living model and reinforce the knowledge thus gained with a certain amount of practical anatomy. For beauty (or grace, which is probably a more exact equivalent of the Italian conception of beauty at the beginning of the sixteenth century), study the best artists of the past, and in particular Graeco-Roman sculpture. Ridolfi's words about Tintoretto would apply equally to Michelangelo. Vasari, who said of Tintoretto's great *Last Judgment* in the Madonna dell'Orto that you would think it had been painted as a joke, would have smiled cynically if he had lived long enough to read them.

But Tintoretto's methods of studying both living models and works of art were his own. The phrases 'All sorts of attitudes,' 'grace of movement,' 'endless rapid sketches,' give one a clue to a new approach to painting. And when one looks at those rapid sketches, one understands how violently unconventional was Tintoretto's attitude to the living model and how different from his predecessors was his notion of the very purpose of drawing from life.

Certainly the Venetian tradition of drawing was fundamentally opposed to the Florentine. Florentine drawings are usually of two kinds. There are the rough indications of the grouping and spacing of a picture, the general conception of how the parts are to be related to the whole. And there are the detailed drawings of parts within the whole. To the Florentine this second type of drawing was a statement, primarily in terms of structure, secondarily of light and shade, of an object—usually a figure or group of figures—to be introduced into a painting. It differed, in this preparatory form, from its ultimate form merely in being smaller and in lacking colour. It was in other respects a full and finished and indispensable work of art, and for that reason Florentine drawings are both numerous and precious. The essence of Florentine genius is contained in them.

The typical Venetian drawing combines the functions of the two kinds of drawings and yet it resembles neither. It is at once a rough sketch of the main stresses and strains, the essential plan of the picture and an indication of the parts within the whole taken just as far as the artist required before beginning to paint. To put it briefly, the Venetian artist preferred to stop working on paper and to start working on canvas at a much earlier stage. To Vasari, soaked as he was in Tuscan tradition, the method seemed remarkable. And doubtless he exaggerates when he says of Giorgione, "He believed painting exclusively with colours without preparatory drawing on paper to be the best procedure." But the method was inevitable for a school of artists who regarded colour as an integral part of the initial conception of a painting rather than an element to be added in the later stages of its evolution.

As a result, drawings by Titian, and even by Bellini and Carpaccio, are related to the paintings for which they are a preparation, in a different way. They are not waiting to be enlarged and transferred to a larger surface. They are merely there to guide and remind the painter of his intentions. If he took them one step further, in the Florentine sense, he would defeat and stultify his intentions. He would be attempting to say in monochrome what could only be said in colour.

For this reason, too, Venetian drawings are rarer than Florentine. Doubtless they were produced in thousands: for no picture could come into being without them. But, once the point had been reached at which the artist began work on his canvas, they were obsolete. Like an orator's half-page of notes for an extempore speech, they would be thrown away once they had served their purpose.

But despite this difference between Florence and Venice, artists of both schools had at least this in common, that for them a drawing was a stepping stone to a picture whose general shape and mood already existed in the mind's eye of the painter. Titian's comparatively rapid and unfinished sketches are of models carefully placed in the attitude he has imagined for them.

It is here that Tintoretto, as described by Ridolfi and as revealed in his drawings, seems to break away from the whole of Renaissance tradition. Those 'endless rapid sketches' of models 'in all sorts of attitudes' and with the emphasis always on 'grace of

movement' seem to have been done rather as an assemblage of raw materials for paintings not yet envisaged than as preparations for specific paintings. It is surely understandable that the young man "without a master," and therefore without the normal studio environment of sketches by his master and his fellow pupils to fall back on, and also without a specific task in front of him, should set himself to make a vast accumulation of drawings for future reference. The method is common enough to-day and has been since the end of the seventeenth century. Watteau, for example, used his sketch books as quarries. With him, the drawing often suggested the very essence of the painting. The turn of a head, the grip of the fingers holding the guitar, jotted down for their own sakes, became, at a later stage, the germ, the starting point from which the picture developed.

I believe that Tintoretto developed, though he did not originate, this method of working, as he developed so many other methods which were later to become part of the baroque artist's normal procedure. It is true that G. de' Grassi of Milan in the fourteenth century and Pisanello in the early fifteenth had filled sketchbooks with elaborate notes of what interested them, but their sketches were prompted by the growing curiosity of the late medieval mind. They were not normal studio procedure. Tintoretto's method of making drawings for future reference was part of a different system. To the Renaissance mind, it must have seemed irresponsible, lacking in discipline, a negation of the central Renaissance idea of a work of art as a thing planned, developed and organized in a series of logical and inevitable steps. These drawings by Tintoretto did not become obsolete, since they were made with no specific end in view. They were hoarded in the studio, filed for reference. And when, in 1645, Tintoretto's daughter Ottavia, wife of one of her brother's assistants, made her will, she bequeathed to her husband two hundred of them: one hundred and fifty of men, fifty of women. Many of the drawings can, as one would expect, be connected with specific figures in his paintings. But it is significant that in some cases when this happens the figure has been reversed, and in others—as, for example, in the foreground figures in the *Worship of the Golden Calf* in the Madonna dell' Orto—a drawing from a male model has been used as the foundation for a female figure.



The most original of the innovations described by Ridolfi is Tintoretto's use of small models of figures in wax or clay, arranged in 'little houses' of wood or cardboard with windows cut into their sides, 'recandosi in tale guisa i lumi e le ombre.'

That last phrase suddenly reveals the origin of so many of Tintoretto's most characteristic and unexpected effects—those curious Last Suppers, for example, in which a fitful light breaks in at unexpected points and from unpredictable angles. In his earliest picture of the subject in the church of San Marcuola in Venice there is no trace of the method. It is a competent High Renaissance picture in the Leonardesque tradition, the table parallel to the picture plane, the disciples arranged with conventional though subtly varied symmetry, the symbolic women at either end placed as squarely as the supporters of a coat of arms, the light interestingly but evenly distributed. The picture is dated 1547. Tintoretto was twenty-nine when he painted it and though by this time he must have begun his experiments in the artificial lighting of his 'piccole case,' one can easily understand how, in this, his first attempt at a subject so heavily laden with the weight of tradition, he would hesitate to put his new methods into practice. But his next big *dated* interior, the *Marriage at Cana* in Santa Maria della Salute, of 1561, could never have been conceived without this device.

Again and again, with ever-increasing complexity, and with astonishing variety, the effect is repeated. One can imagine how, by a slight shift in angle of the containing box, a slight raising or lowering of the lamp that provided him with a substitute for the light of day, a new window cut here, an existing one blocked up there, the same simple interior could be made to offer an infinite number of different effects, each with its own set of dramatic possibilities. One can search the whole corpus of previous pictorial art in vain for anything remotely foreshadowing Tintoretto's handling of light. Light as a necessary element, a kind of universal visual lubricant, is part of every artist's conception of the visible world: the subdued evenly distributed light used by Botticelli or Ghirlandajo. Light as a phenomenon to be 'copied,' in the same sense that the artist 'copies' form, had been used by certain early Flemish artists. In the Ghent altarpiece by the Van Eyck brothers there is even a tiny splash of direct sunlight falling on a window-jamb, probably the earliest representation of sunlight as opposed to



daylight in the history of art. Light unevenly distributed, as a valuable aid to the drama of the scene depicted, had already been used, hesitantly by Giovanni Bellini, daringly by Titian. Unusual kinds of light, notably Raphael's brave attempt at a nocturne with moonlight competing with angelic radiance in the *Deliverance of St. Peter*, painted in 1511, or Titian's torchlight and firelight in the *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* (1550-5) were beginning to be explored, though I feel that here Titian may have been momentarily under the spell of Tintoretto. But light as a free element that could be directed on to any given spot, could flood any given area, or be withheld at will, thereby producing a pattern quite unrelated to the structural pattern of the physical objects on which it fell, was something entirely new.

It would be absurd to pretend that it was an accidental discovery following on a home-made device. The histories of both art and science are full of such discoveries but they are never fortuitous, though anecdotal biographers like to dwell on the fortuitous element in them, thereby robbing their heroes of the credit for the sudden imaginative leap in the dark that enabled them to see a new world of possibilities in a familiar phenomenon. Newton's apple, the chemical accident that led Senefelder to the discovery of lithography, the boiling kettle that suggested the possibility of a steam engine are no more than signposts waiting for the right man to read them. Tintoretto's boxes could never have been invented by a man who was not already fanatically interested in the impact and the direction of light and in its relation to space. But, once invented, they proved an almost miraculous stimulus to his imaginative processes, and they continued to stimulate him almost to the end of his life. The *Finding of the Body of St. Mark* (now in the Brera) ordered in 1562, is an extreme example of a picture which could hardly have been envisaged at that time without some such artificial aid. The *Last Supper* at San Giorgio Maggiore (Pl. 69), finished thirty-two years later, in the year of his death, is more than a *tour de force* by an artist to whom the handling of light in space no longer presents any difficulty. Here Tintoretto directs his jets of illumination, both natural and supernatural, with the ease of a gardener playing a hose on to a distant bed of flowers, or the precision of a ballet dancer who times the movements of his body with the pulse of the music so that space and time seem to become

a single, indivisible unit. One can no longer explain such a picture in terms of mechanical devices. It begins to have that elusive, mystical quality that is only found in the ultimate works of very great artists. But between this and the youthful *Last Supper* of San Marcuola (Pl. 2) one can trace Tintoretto's development as a master of stage lighting (I am not concerned here with his more important development as an interpreter of Christian faith) through a series of Last Suppers of which the most notable are those in the churches of San Trovaso and San Polo in Venice, and in the Scuola of San Rocco. (Pls. 22, 23, 39.)

Finally, Ridolfi describes how Tintoretto used to suspend his clay or wax models of figures by wires from the ceiling so as to get a view of them from below. Again one suddenly realizes the mechanical origin of those flying and floating figures that inhabit, with such apparent ease, the upper parts of so many of Tintoretto's paintings. And again one knows quite well that their mechanical origin was merely a short cut to something already visualized passionately in Tintoretto's mind's eye. The first major appearance of these aerial creatures is in the fully clothed figure of St. Mark who hurtles downwards through the air in the *Miracle of the Slave*. It is certainly not one of his most convincing: indeed it may easily have been painted before the system of small suspended models had been fully developed. One has only to turn the picture upside down to see that it could easily have been painted from a reversed study of a recumbent male model. The bulkiness and fall of the drapery suggest a clothed human being rather than a suspended figure with *imagined* drapery added. The truly Tintorettesque flying figure is first seen in the two organ doors (St. Peter and St. Paul) in the Madonna dell' Orto. After this they appear with increasing frequency and their effortless buoyancy becomes more remarkable with each appearance. In the *Rescue of the Saracen* St. Mark descends from above and lifts the suspended Saracen by the armpits as though he were weightless. The upper halves of the huge *Last Judgment* and *Worship of the Golden Calf* are crowded—and rather unconvincingly crowded—with airborne figures. After this one could almost say that the motive is in danger of becoming a cliché. But the best of them are unforgettable. Surely one of the most marvellous conceptions in the

whole history of painting is the unhurried, irresistible curved sweep of Venus through the upper space of the *Bacchus and Ariadne* in the Anticollegio of the Ducal Palace (1577). Surely never elsewhere in art did a human figure achieve that planetary onrush through the ether. Here is no loss of weight, and the marvel is that, for once, Tintoretto arranges this divine movement in the minimum of available space. In most of his pictures the full volume of the heavens is at the disposal of its inhabitants. Here the goddess pursues her majestic way through a space that cannot be contained within the picture frame. The arc of the huge circle she follows seems to fill the whole air of the Anticollegio. One becomes, as it were, a part of the infinite as one stands in front of this miraculous act of levitation.

‘On these foundations,’ says Ridolfi, ‘did Tintoretto base his method.’ They are ingenious but simple foundations, and there would have been no need for them but for that merciful expulsion of a boy in his teens from Titian’s studio after ten days of apprenticeship. What would have happened if the apprenticeship had lasted for the usual six or seven years cannot be guessed. Tintoretto was certainly not the kind of artist to be stifled by studio tradition. Light, space, and movement were his inevitable objectives. No previous artist had even attempted to create a fusion of the three elements. All one can say with certainty is that the time was ripe. The home-made short-cuts to them would probably have come in any case later; the revolution would merely have been postponed. Though the danger with a postponed artistic revolution is that by the time it becomes possible the artist has already formed a set of purely technical habits that interfere with the full freedom of experiment. But the time was also ripe for an even bigger revolution. Sooner or later the continuity of Renaissance studio-tradition had to be broken. Someone had to be the first ‘self-made’ artist, the first of the race of inspired amateurs who are so familiar to-day. Providence could not have chosen a better man for the purpose than Tintoretto.

### *Chapter Three*

#### THE INSPIRED ECLECTIC

THERE is no such thing in art as an original style. True, every work of art is stamped with its creator's personality, and a personality is, by definition, unique. But his personality is the product of his environment; his environment is the sum total of his experience: and the part played by existing works of art in the experience of an artist is always greater than is generally supposed. The debt every artist owes to his contemporaries and to his immediate predecessors may not be apparent at the time, but a generation after his death unsuspected stylistic relationships begin to appear. Whereupon art historians, always eager to explain works of art in terms of their pedigrees, diligently undertake the search for influences.

They are, of course, right to do so. The influence of one artist on another is of paramount importance in estimating artistic achievement. Yet the way in which an artist becomes infected by the influence of others is seldom as simple as the art historian seems to suppose.

In cases where the pupil-and-master relationship is paramount the problem is to some extent simplified, though it is still subject to surprising complexities. Just what happened to Raphael after he had emerged from the shadow of Perugino, or to Van Dyck when he discovered that he had something to say that could not be said in the idiom of Rubens is beyond the range of human guess-work. In order to speak with any authority on such matters it would be necessary to know far more than we could possibly know. Under what conditions, in what mood, did Raphael catch his first glimpse of the newly painted Sistine Chapel ceiling? Had anything prepared him for the experience? Had he already begun to be conscious of the limitations of his own powers? Had he a secret ambition to outpaint his rivals, or was he just an unusually



receptive artist in an unusually receptive frame of mind at that critical moment?

These are not academic questions. Every artist knows how a painting, seen perhaps for no more than a couple of seconds out of the corner of his eye as he crosses a room, can produce a shock of revelation which may alter his whole outlook, sometimes consciously, often unconsciously. He knows, too, that it is not always a masterpiece that produces this stimulating effect. Every artist, during his formative period, contains within himself not only a positive creative force but a set of empty, negative areas, like patches of tilled earth waiting for the seed to fall. And, for each artist, only a certain kind of seed will germinate in these negative areas.

In the case of a young painter who has served a longish apprenticeship under a mature artist these negative areas tend to get filled up early in his career. They have been, as it were, bedded out by his master; and they retain his influence for many years. But in Tintoretto's case no such bedding-out process occurred. In his teens he had to do his own tilling and sowing without guidance. Ridolfi's account of his workshop methods, as described in the last chapter, is an account of what corresponds to tilling—the preparation of the soil. It was a remarkable process: it contained all manner of ideas new to the mid-sixteenth century; it explains, superficially, a great many of the well-known characteristics of Tintoretto's art. But it does not explain how Tintoretto linked himself to the artistic traditions of his time at so critical a moment of their development. It takes no account, in fact, of the art historian's favourite theme—influence. What seeds fell on the empty tilled areas, which of them sprang up quickly and then withered and which of them took permanent root, is a problem that has nothing to do with workshop methods.

Ridolfi indicates in a few vivid pages the feverish attempts Tintoretto made to get into touch with artists and craftsmen of every kind wherever he could find them at work. He visited studios and workshops, he hung about wherever masons and plasterers were at work, watching the processes of mixing and colouring plaster. His earliest technical interest was certainly in fresco painting, not, surely, because he found the medium congenial, but because the open-air craftsmen of Venice were easily



approachable and would certainly not object to allowing an energetic and intelligent boy to lend a hand on the kind of jobs they were doing. The practice of applying unambitious decorations in colour to the outer walls of shops and houses was still in vogue, and Tintoretto's early practice of it—naturally these juvenilia have all disappeared: they were not in any case intended to be permanent—must have given him the breadth of sweep that was always his chief characteristic, and that so easily degenerated whenever he was uninspired or pressed for time, into a kind of superb scene-painting.

But for a young man of boundless ambition whose secret aim must have been to succeed, even if he could not supplant the ageing Titian, hack work on a large scale was not enough. The craft of oil painting on small wooden panels or on larger surfaces of canvas had also to be learned, but in this direction the opportunities for learning were not so easily found. It was to Schiavone that the young man first turned for guidance and to whom he first offered himself as unofficial assistant.

Andrea Schiavone, Tintoretto's senior by about ten years, was a Slav by birth who came to Venice as a young man, and worked in a desultory fashion as an assistant to Titian. By temperament a small-scale painter, he specialized in the painting of furniture panels and cassoni which gave him exactly the opportunities he needed. Grandeur was beyond his scope and so was the depth of feeling required by religious subjects. But for little allegories, idylls, mythologies, in which pastoral landscape was blended with small and gracious figures, he had a delightful talent. And in the Venice of his day such a talent was in constant demand. Furniture-painting, especially on cassoni, was very much in vogue. Schiavone's workshop must have been a busy one and if Tintoretto offered his services it was not likely that Schiavone would refuse them. If we had more evidence of Tintoretto's personal handwriting in his late teens and early twenties, it might be possible to attribute to him some of the little pictures that came out of Schiavone's shop.

In any case, it was probably in Schiavone's shop that Tintoretto learned the art of painting in oils; and it was there too that he learned the Venetian way of embedding his groups of figures firmly into their landscape background, of adjusting the scale of

the figures to the space they fill so that they have room to move and breathe easily in their environment of little woods and lush meadows. Schiavone's inventiveness in the handling of landscape—his habit of throwing broad shadows over some areas and picking out others in light—had its effect on the younger painter. The slenderness and rather affected grace of the figures themselves—which, in his turn, Schiavone had picked up as a mannerism from studying drawings and prints after Parmigiano—constantly recur in the smaller background figures in Tintoretto's later work, as though the Schiavonesque tricks came back to him whenever he had to work on a small scale. And certainly, in this little factory of idylls and mythologies, the half-educated but receptive young Tintoretto must have picked up a good deal of the Renaissance love of Pagan story and the particular Venetian feeling for the pastoral element in paganism.

All this artistic gleaning was a necessary first stage not only for the purpose of collecting technical experience, but also for the more immediate need to earn money and to obtain commissions. But Tintoretto was both too serious and too self-conscious to be content with opportunities of this sort. Schiavone could teach him the elements of his craft and give him opportunities of seeing a typical minor Venetian at work. In Schiavone's presence, Tintoretto could soak himself in the lyrical and pastoral elegancies that marked the end of the tradition started by Bellini, developed by Giorgione and, to a great extent, exhausted by Titian. But Tintoretto did not see himself as a lyrical-pastoral painter. He had set himself a sterner task than that of elaborating the Schiavonesque formula. He had to find a new formula of his own and he had to do so quite deliberately. There is no reason to doubt Ridolfi when he says that Tintoretto wrote his formula—"The drawing of Michelangelo and the colour of Titian"—on the wall of one of his rooms, even though he seems to have been so little successful in putting it into practice.

To our twentieth-century ways of thinking, deliberate eclecticism is rather repellent. If an artist feels that Titian's design is insufficiently taut and explicit, or that Michelangelo's colour has too little emotional significance, surely he need not be so self-conscious in his resolve to remedy these defects. Is that how genius goes to work, concocting a new dish by mixing the ingre-

dients in two unrelated—two almost antagonistic dishes? Surely that is precisely the frame of mind that nearly accomplished Raphael's downfall and made the eclectic school of Bologna so insipid? An artist's style, as already noted, cannot be original, but it must at least grow organically from within and not be self-imposed from without. That may be the method of the craftsman, the chef, for example. But even the chef does not set himself to combine the astringency of a salad dressing with the sweetness of a chocolate sauce. Surely, in art, it is intensity not universality that counts. To take an extreme case, the artist who resolved to combine the pattern of a Persian miniature with the light and shade of a Rembrandt portrait would end by achieving neither.

When a great genius proclaims, in his early youth, that he is about to construct a synthetic style based on the combined excellencies of his predecessors, and then proceeds to paint pictures that are manifestly neither synthetic nor eclectic, but intensely personal, one is bound to inquire a little more closely, firstly into the reasons why he considered a motto necessary at all, and secondly into the precise meaning he attached to it.

In view of what has been said already about the crisis in Italian painting that occurred between 1530 and 1540, and about Tintoretto's unique situation as an artist who found himself in his early, formative years, masterless *malgré lui*, it becomes clear that he was compelled to make up his mind about his policy. He had to think out quickly and intellectually what the average apprenticed artist could afford to grasp slowly and intuitively. The problem of how to embark on a career must seem quite different to the sixth-form schoolboy, safely sheltering behind the machinery of his school, and to the bright but perhaps maladjusted boy expelled from school for no apparent reason and deprived of the benefits of a protective organization. The position of the latter is certainly precarious, but his mind will work, for that very reason, more daringly and more speculatively. As a pupil of either Michelangelo or Titian, Tintoretto would have settled down into the ready-made routine, would have run smoothly along the ready-made tracks, and become a mannerist—admittedly the greatest—in a generation of mannerists.

But Tintoretto did not become a mannerist. He was never

submitted for long enough to pressure from any given manner. And yet the artistic crisis referred to in the first chapter made it imperative for him to have a guiding principle and even to inscribe it, as Ridolfi tells us he did, on the wall of his studio in order to remind himself of its importance.

The crisis was one of sheer exhaustion. The mannerists of Tuscany and of the Veneto were all attempting the impossible and trying to grow the same old crop on the exhausted soil. Tintoretto, bursting with new ideas, fully prepared to take the first step in the new direction—in fact, incapable, by virtue of his particular genius, of *not* taking it—none the less knew instinctively that he must attach himself *somehow* to a starting point. Being the bright boy expelled from school, his personal loyalties were not involved. He was under no obligation to behave like a respectable Old Vecellian, but he knew Titian's worth and he also knew his weaknesses. He could not foresee that Titian was about to turn those very weaknesses to good account by taking a considerable step, himself, in a new direction—a direction in some ways more influential in the pattern of art history than Tintoretto's own. He only knew that Michelangelo, the Michelangelo of the Sistine Chapel and the Medici Tombs, had something to teach him that was beyond the range of Titian. He was free to behave, whenever he felt inclined, as an Old Buonarottian. The names of the two giants were on every lip. They occurred to the mind of 1540 as automatically as Eton and Harrow to-day. Automatically, Tintoretto adopted them. His motto was an affirmation, as who should say, 'I may be an uneducated person, but I am not an irresponsible iconoclast unaware of the high traditions of my calling. I may have missed the benefits of a public school education, but I am aware of the value of the public school spirit. I have even this advantage over the public school man, that no single school can claim my allegiance.'

So much for the reason for adopting a motto. But just what the motto meant to Tintoretto himself is not so easy to define. 'Disegno' contains all the implications of the two words 'draughtsmanship' and 'design.' 'Draughtsmanship,' however one chooses to define it, is certainly a quality that Michelangelo possessed in as high a degree as any artist known to us. 'Design' is rather a



different matter. It implies the total organization of a work of art, the relationship of part to part, and of part to whole; and here Michelangelo, though an undoubted master, was certainly not unique, nor did he ever set himself such massive problems of design as Raphael in the *Parnassus*. The organization of the Sistine Chapel ceiling is masterly but it is comparatively simple. When Tintoretto designed the *Miracle of the Slave* he was exploring a region that Michelangelo had never explored. If 'organization' was what Tintoretto had in mind, Signorelli or Raphael would have been better models. But one must remember that Tintoretto had almost certainly never been away from Venice in these early years. There is, indeed, no proof that he left Venice more than once in his whole life. His only documented journey is the trip to Mantua in 1580, in connection with the eight battle pieces he had painted for the Gonzaga family.

If, then, by 'il disegno di Michel Angelo' Tintoretto meant the 'draughtsmanship' of Michelangelo, whose finished work he had never seen, he must have based his admiration partly on the second-hand evidence of the small casts of the four recumbent statues in the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo (which were not available till 1557), partly from such engravings as may have been available in Venice, and partly from original drawings by Michelangelo. All this does not amount to much. Tintoretto's knowledge of Michelangelo's achievement must have been fragmentary. Moreover Tintoretto's own drawings are so different in intention from Michelangelo's that it is difficult to see any close connection between them. Michelangelo's pen or chalk line is always engaged in describing muscular tensions and relaxations, the subtle transitions from bony to soft structures. His drawings are searching statements about the infinite complexity of the human body in action. Tintoretto's are not at all complex in this sense. They are astonishing studies of the human body in *movement* rather than in *action*, and though its muscular aspect is exaggerated (whereas Michelangelo merely stresses it as a sculptor naturally would), everything is sacrificed to the impression of noble, restless *energy*. Michelangelo's drawings are profound essays in gesture. Tintoretto's are rapid notes of movement. In essence they are far more like Rodin's drawings from the model than Michelangelo's. And Rodin's later sculptures with their fitful, rippling surfaces offer a



remarkably close parallel to Tintoretto's charcoal explorations of precisely the same visual problem.

Yet it is not surprising that Tintoretto, despite his fragmentary knowledge of Michelangelo's masterpieces, should have chosen him as one of his two artistic godfathers. One must not forget the hypnotic power of Michelangelo's name. There are plenty of people to-day who speak glibly of the verbal magic of Shakespeare, the sonorous grandeur of Milton, the charm of Matisse, the power of Picasso on the strength of a few hackneyed quotations or familiarity with a few inadequate colour-prints. The weight of a reputation is irresistible and even an independent mind like Tintoretto's could succumb to it, especially if he were convinced that there was something lacking even in the best of the Venetian works with which he was most familiar.

That 'something' was evidently a sculptural quality, a sense of structure, weight and volume, combined with a sense of the magnificence of gesture in its own right. Michelangelo's *terribilità* was a purely Tuscan quality. The single figures of Athletes, Prophets and Sybils in the Sistine Chapel are not engaged on any particular task. They are merely striking attitudes that are memorable and effective within the limits of their general characters. Jeremiah is brooding, Isaiah is thundering righteous indignation, the Delphic Sybil is in an inspired trance, the athletes are combining grace with power in various proportions but for no specific purpose.

That preoccupation with generalized gesture was certainly not characteristically Venetian. Venetian design, before Tintoretto, was always governed by the requirements of illustration or narrative. Memorable single figures like Palma Vecchio's *Santa Barbara* in the church of Santa Maria Formosa are rare, and when they do occur one is always reminded of Raphael. The central theme of Venetian painting is the kind of action that arises out of a specific incident. The crowded narratives of Carpaccio and Gentile Bellini had certainly been largely replaced by the more lyrical, poetical creations of Giorgione and the younger Titian, but even in them the element of *genre* is never far away, and the individual figure, whether in action or repose, is always 'doing' rather than 'being.' In front of Carpaccio's monks flying in terror from St. Jerome's lion or the two pensive figures in Giorgione's *Tempesta* one asks

equally, 'What is happening? What is the story behind the picture?' And, in proportion as the individual figure—whether it be a sprinting monk or a soldier leaning dreamily on his spear—is engaged in contributing to a narrative, he is ceasing to be graceful or impressive in his own right.

I believe it was this self-contained, sculptural impressiveness that Tintoretto had in mind when he used the phrase "Il disegno di Michel Angelo." It was a quality he could find more easily in Volterano's casts of the Medici tomb figures than in the works, drawn or painted, of Michelangelo himself. And it is significant that among the most important items in his equipment were home-made clay or wax models done, presumably, in very much the same spirit. It is also significant that the more completely Tintoretto manages to express this self-contained sculptural grandeur in his paintings the less relevant becomes the question "What is happening? What is the story behind the picture?" The paradox of the master of narrative who painted so many dramatic themes and painted them so dramatically—even so melodramatically—and yet minimized their narrative content, will need to be explained later when we come to examine Tintoretto's attitude to his subject-matter.

What Tintoretto meant by the 'colorito' of Titian is a little easier to understand. But for him the words 'colour' and 'colouring' did not mean quite what they do to us. For us the words imply colour harmonization or colour orchestration—the organization of colour in a decorative or emotional sense. If this was what Tintoretto had meant by 'colorito,' Titian would surely not have been his model. Exquisite 'colourists' (Simone Martini or Lorenzo Monaco, for instance) had occurred among the primitives. And highly organized decorative colour had been one of the foundations of Venetian painting since its beginning. In our sense of the word the great colourists of Venetian painting are not Titian and his immediate disciples but Carpaccio, Bellini and, later, Veronese. These are the men who invented those surprising and thrilling juxtapositions of colour that are the monopoly of Venice, but are best seen in the decorative side of Venetian painting. Colour as used in oriental art, and inevitably echoed in the art of Venice, because geographically and politically she

face eastwards, is best seen in Carpaccio and Veronese. They, not Titian and Palma, are the true interpreters in colour of the semi-oriental Venetian pageantry. Why then did Tintoretto choose Titian as his model as a colourist?

The answer is not difficult. Partly, of course, as in the case of Michelangelo, it was the magic of the name. Pino's Lauro automatically quotes Titian as the artistic complement of Michelangelo; 'colore' (not 'colorito') and 'disegno' were, in Pino's mind, the important elements in painting, and for him, as for the whole of his generation, Tintoretto included, Titian and Michelangelo were unrivalled in their respective fields. No other names, for him, were possible. A twentieth-century eclectic, searching for supreme masters of line on the one hand and of colour on the other, would be more likely to choose Piero or Botticelli for the first, Carpaccio for the second. Our choice would be the exquisite half-unfolded bud; Pino's and Tintoretto's, the full-blown flower at the brief moment before its petals fall. The difference between the two pairs is, of course, that our pair were each capable of further development along their chosen lines, Tintoretto's pair were not: they could go no further. They were the last of their kind, and therefore their kind is easier to analyse and contrast.

Michelangelo had accepted the breath-taking subtlety of Piero's and Botticelli's line, and, without relaxing any of its tension, had turned it into a means for expressing *structure*. Titian had grown up in the tradition of Carpaccio's semi-oriental use of colour, and without sacrificing too much of its exquisiteness, had used it for the expression of *surface*. The distinction is not between linear design on the one hand and colour orchestration on the other but between—to use Wölfflin's terminology—the linear and the painterly, or, to be more accurate, between the sculptural and the painterly. Michelangelo's human beings have bodies and draperies that are primarily modelled but happen to be coloured. Titian's are primarily colourful but happen to be structurally interesting.

For the purpose of understanding just what Tintoretto meant by the 'colorito' of Titian, the phrase in the last paragraph 'without sacrificing too much of its exquisiteness' is important. Something of Carpaccio's decorative orchestration had to be sacrificed as soon as Titian began to be more interested in coloured surfaces than in coloured shapes. There is no limit to the chromatic

beauty of a patchwork counterpane, which is an organization of coloured shapes. There is a limit to the chromatic beauty of a pile of crumpled textiles, which is an organization of coloured surfaces. The broken shadow as the light passes across these irregular surfaces may be fascinating—Titian found it irresistible—but it is not a purely chromatic fascination. Only the man who has begun to lose interest in colour as colour, and shape as shape, can succumb to it. To him the glow and shimmer of the surface is more important than either its intrinsic local colour, or its containing contour, or its structure.

Moreover a technical question is involved. Reed pen or silver-point were perfect tools for producing modulated line and cross-hatched shading; tempera on a prepared white gesso surface was the perfect medium for producing areas of flat or gradated colour. Both had a long and honourable history. But the perfect medium for expressing surface shimmer had only recently been invented. In Tintoretto's youth and Titian's middle age it was only a few decades old. And Titian was the first painter to grasp its full possibilities. The 'painterliness' of Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* was not only beyond the imagination of previous artists: it was also beyond their technical means. Only the invention of oil paint made it possible, and only after a decade of trial and error could Titian himself do justice to the subtleties of surface-texture and surface-glow that he himself had discovered. His contribution to painting was not in the direction of colour orchestration but of painterly handling of the new medium. Tintoretto's phrase refers to this new interest in surface and new handling of paint. 'Colore' can only be translated as 'colour.' But 'colorito' means something more like 'method of putting colour on to a prepared surface.'

To sum up, we find in the young Tintoretto, a man in a rather complicated frame of mind: a youth quite certain of his genius, determined to give it the fullest scope, aware that uncharted regions lay ahead of him and confident that he alone could explore them—but, at the same time, conscious of inadequate equipment and anxious to build for himself the firmest possible foundations for the task he had undertaken. That foundation he summed up in a phrase the equivalent of which in to-day's language would be 'the firm structure of a sculptor and the vibrating surface of an



oil painter.' Once that has been understood, it becomes less puzzling that even his earliest pictures are free from that painful effect of sedulous emulation that one finds in the true eclectic. He is neither a good Michelangelist nor a great colourist. He is a new kind of artist, the first to discover how to look *at* and *below* the surface at the same time. The key to his art is not to be found in his motto, which looks back into the past, but in the kind of problems he tried to solve and the spirit in which he solved them. They were problems that, in the mid-sixteenth century, belonged to the future, problems that neither Michelangelo nor Titian could have understood.

At this point it may be useful to quote an extract from Marco Boschini's detailed description of Tintoretto's method, for Boschini had a more intelligent understanding of Jacopo's genius than Ridolfi. In his *Ricche Minere della Pittura Veneziana*, first published in 1664, twenty-two years after Ridolfi's biography, his short essay on Tintoretto includes the following illuminating passages which confirm and add to Ridolfi's account of his method.

Whenever he had to paint for a public building he first examined the place for which it was destined in order to estimate the height and distance from the eye. Then, in order to work out his conception, he placed on a flat table wax figures made by himself, arranging them in serpentine or pyramidal compositions, and in fanciful, lively attitudes. But in order to make the ensemble effective he paid great attention both to the inside and the outside of the model, producing strong lights and shadows and reflections. Sometimes he threw the foreground figures into shadow and illuminated the distance: at other times he kept the principal figures illuminated and reserved the shadow for the distance: sometimes he threw the light on to one figure to make an effective contrast, using all kinds of clever devices, taking pictorial liberties and inventing new rules and systems of painting.

Once he had established this all-important general arrangement he sketched in the whole picture in light and shade. . . . And having roughed-in his canvas he placed it in position to make sure that he had accurately carried out his intentions. And if by chance he noticed anything that interfered with the planned harmony, he was quite capable of changing not only a single figure, but, as a result of the alteration, of readjusting all the neighbouring figures, fearing to expend neither time nor trouble. . . .

Then, having planned the general composition, he studied, as a

separate process and with great accuracy, the colouring, in order to fulfil his obligations as a painter. But he altered the forms of the figures at will, increasing their expressiveness, changing them to a more graceful, vigorous or pleasing shape by emphasizing the muscles or by giving them a more flowing contour. For he is a poor creature who thinks he can find forms in Nature that possess all the perfections.

The finest quality of his colouring was reserved for his nudes, into which he infused the impression of flesh and blood, as one can see in his masterpiece in the Scuola of San Marco. He was prodigal of his half-tones and shadows but sparing in his high lights.

With his vigorous brushwork he gave the illusion, at a distance, of exquisite finish. . . . It is true that those who see this method at close quarters and are not deeply versed in the art of painting imagine that these brushstrokes were designed to save himself time and trouble. But they are mistaken, because they are impressed by his skill and bravura.

As regards the beauty of the rest of his colouring, he gave it little consideration, though he knew how to do so, as one can see in many of his works, especially when he painted the altarpiece for the Cruciferi in competition with Paolo Veronese. . . .

In painting the drapery his method was to add its folds after painting the nude figures, so that though the figures were well clothed, the form of the limbs can be well seen beneath them.

Such were Tintoretto's methods of solving his problems. They were neither Titian's nor Michelangelo's problems. Nor were they finally solved by Tintoretto himself. For their final solution one has to wait for Rubens and Rembrandt.

## *Chapter Four*

### INNOVATIONS

TO declare oneself, publicly, a disciple of Michelangelo and Titian and yet to point the way towards Rubens and Rembrandt is a considerable feat. It involves, as has been said before, not only a link between past and future but also a change of direction as between past and future. The purpose of the present chapter is to define that change.

When a great artist begins to attract the attention of his contemporaries, they may be amazed or puzzled, enthusiastic or scornful, but they cannot distinguish between the newness of his vision and the newness of his method. The first is born with him and dies with him. While he was alive, it was his monopoly, an incommunicable part of himself. It can never be handed down to posterity. The second is seized on by all the more alert of his contemporaries, adopted by his successors, becomes part of tradition and remains so until eventually it is discarded as being useless as a means of expressing the Spirit of the age.

For us it is fairly easy to sort out what was Tintoretto's own, the genuinely Tintorettesque elements which are always to be found in his work and never occur in the work of any other painter, from these other elements which are also found in his work but which can be discovered equally in the work of his disciples and which persist in the work of men painting centuries later. It is with these imitable elements that the present chapter is concerned. Cumulatively, they form the basis on which Baroque art is built. In singling out Rubens and Rembrandt I do not suggest that these two artists were more directly influenced than others of the seventeenth century, but that, as wholehearted exponents of two different aspects of Baroque painting, one finds in them the most complete logical working out of certain ways of feeling and seeing, which are traceable to Tintoretto but can hardly

be discovered, except as casual hints, in any painting before his time.

For the purpose of analysis it is necessary to consider Tintoretto's innovations under headings and subheadings. It is, alas, the only possible method. Analysis means, by derivation, the splitting up of something that can only fully assert itself if it remains intact. It is necessary, in a treatise on the nature of water, to explain that oxygen and hydrogen are its ingredients. Yet, since neither bears any resemblance to water, it is even more necessary to explain that only when the two are fused in certain proportions and under certain conditions, does water result.

It is equally important to make it clear that having examined Tintoretto's use of light, of space, of composition, grouping and movement, one has still done no more than describe a set of characteristics which do not begin to be Tintorettesque until they have been fused together in certain proportions and under certain conditions. And though the proportions can be indicated roughly, the conditions remain a mystery.

Given the ingredients and the fusion, a specimen of the Tintorettesque results—a painting which the eye can take in at a flash, noting the total effect almost without effort and certainly without consciousness of its complexity. The eye needs no more than a few seconds. Not so the mind. The mind can only pursue one by one the elements that went to the picture's making, though it can ease its own task by constantly referring back to the total effect and relating to that total effect the little piecemeal fraction which alone it is capable of examining at any given moment; and also—since we are dealing with innovations—by relating that fraction to the corresponding fractions in the work of earlier painters.

It hardly matters, then, in what order one examines Tintoretto's innovations, provided one makes it clear at the outset that the very word 'order' is a contradiction of everything that Tintoretto had in mind when he painted. But since the notion of space is fundamental to his conception of painting, it may as well be our starting point. Light, movement, composition-in-depth can only exist within the space that contains them.

The history of the artist's conquest of space is familiar. It need not be told in detail here, but it is important to realize what stage in the conquest had been reached when Tintoretto began to paint,



Space is, in any case, the last aspect of the visual world to be understood by the artist, partly because it is the last aspect that he needs for the purpose of self-expression—space could never be an integral part of the medieval artist's conception of the material or the spiritual world; colour and form were essentials to it—and partly because of the hypnotic power of the surface on which he painted. The picture's surface, for the primitive, is primarily a surface to be enriched with decoration and symbolism. Naturally he cannot think entirely in two-dimensional terms; his symbolic Madonna must hold Her divine Child *in front of Her*. And even if the artist does not conceive Her as having volume, he cannot help thinking of the Child as being nearer to himself—i.e., occupying a different position in space—than the Mother. But apart from this elementary admission, wrung out of him, as it were, against his will, he does everything he can to deny the existence of space. His gold background absolves him from the obligation to describe what is behind Her. It places Her in an idealized context in which the words 'in front' and 'behind' have no meaning. She exists, two-dimensionally, on the surface of the painted panel, and what we call Her 'background' is not an expression of space but of mood.

With the advent of the Renaissance and the growing realization of the desirability of the material world, the true 'background' comes into being, and in order to realize and control the background it becomes necessary to discover the optical laws that govern its appearance. The laws of perspective have to be formulated. At once it becomes possible not only to arrange wide landscape or architectural backgrounds to figures, but to take into account that the figures themselves have volume and occupy space within the framework of their environment.

But in spite of this, the hypnotic power of the surface persists. The artist clings to his original conception of a symbolic figure or figures painted on the picture plane, not conceived as being at any specific distance from the spectator supported by a background which is still, in his mind's eye, in a plane *parallel* to the picture's surface, though not *on* the picture's surface. Gradually this background splits itself up into a series of planes, thought of as being one behind the other, like the wings and ground rows of stage scenery behind which lies the ultimate backcloth, still parallel

to the surface however remote it may be. And the objects or figures which occupy the foreground are equally disposed in planes parallel to the picture plane. Even though they may find it necessary to arrange themselves one behind the other, they either crowd themselves forward towards the footlights of the imaginary stage, in their endeavour to get as near as possible to the hypnotic picture-plane, or they firmly inhabit one of the imaginary planes created by the scenic background.

Thus, though the existence of space is at last admitted, the spectator's eye is never led into it. It has to progress from foreground to background in a series of jumps. The artist allows himself to paint a spatial world, but he cannot inhabit it, still less can he move in it. From side to side, across his canvas, he is completely mobile. From back to front, from footlights to backcloth, he can only progress jerkily as though he were jumping a set of hurdles. This limitation dictates his composition, and, even more significantly, his treatment of his theme. His characters on one plane, for example, are *psychologically* as well as spatially cut off from those on another. They cannot speak to each other. They can hardly even gesticulate to each other. Christ can only address His disciples at the Last Supper if the table lies parallel to the picture-plane. The Virgin Mary can only be presented to the High Priest if the steps she ascends are parallel to the footlights. Venus can only reach the shore if the winds blow her *across* the surface of the picture: the Virgin of the Assumption ascends vertically above the heads of the Apostles.

This dominance of the picture-plane persists throughout the fifteenth century and well into the sixteenth. It enslaves Titian almost as much as Botticelli. In order to break it down a step of extraordinary imaginative daring had to be taken. It was, in effect, a step across the footlights on to the stage, or a step, such as Alice took, through the barrier of the looking-glass into an unexplored world.

Tintoretto took the step fairly early in his career, and spent the years of his maturity in endless exploration. Space in his hands gradually took on a new aspect. Up to his time a picture could be thought of as an architect's elevation. After him, it had both an elevation and a ground plan. Once he had left the auditorium and taken his stand on the stage he became mobile in any direction

and all the old apparatus of wings, flats, ground-rows and backcloths became obsolete. Once it had become possible to see them from the side, their lack of solidity became apparent.

It would be unfair to Titian to say that no hint of this new conception of space is to be found in his work prior to 1550, when the influence of Tintoretto must have begun to count with him. But such adventures in back-to-front movement as he undertook are almost always confined to his landscape backgrounds and middle distances. The two mountain peaks in the background of his *Presentation of the Virgin* (1538) are conceived in depth as convincingly as any mountain mass by Turner, and in the background of the *St. John the Baptist* (1545) in the Accademia at Venice is a glimpse of a wooded hillside with a stream rushing freely *towards* the spectator. A rather awkward attempt to show a crowd of figures in depth occurs in the *Ecce Homo* (1543) in Vienna. The lost *Battle of Cadore* must have been a decisive step forward. But one has to search for such examples.

Tintoretto's earliest paintings are still seen from the auditorium. The dating of his pictures has always presented the critic with difficulties, and later chapters must tackle the problem. For my present purpose I propose to consider only a handful of representative paintings whose dates can be more or less definitely established.

A typical early work, the *Apollo and Marsyas* (Pl. 1), completed in February 1545 for Pietro Aretino's house, a comparatively simple Schiavonesque essay in pastoral mythology, is designed on conventional lines, with the figures arranged in two parallel planes. Apollo occupies the left foreground, balanced on the right by one of the Nysaeen judges of the musical contest. Marsyas in the second plane is equally balanced by a group of three Nysaeans. The mountainous background is no more than a backcloth; one has to jump over the heads of the figures and traverse an undefined intermediate space in order to reach it. There is no attempt to entice the eye back to it or to establish a relationship between it and the figures. The only Tintorettesque hint in it is the half-hearted attempt to link the nearest of the umpires to his three companions by making him swing round and turn his back to the spectator in order to address them. This is the first instance of a characteristic habit—the foreground figure with its back to the

spectator, placed there less for its inherent significance than for the sake of introducing the spectator to the main theme and helping him to take the first step into the picture.

Two years later, the *Last Supper* of San Marcuola (Pl. 2), already referred to, is his first *dated* interior. Here, since Tintoretto was content to follow the accepted tradition of keeping the table parallel to the picture plane, there was practically no spatial problem to solve. He even simplified the spatial theme by leaving the far wall of the room blank. Again he insists on two planes for his figures, but this time he links them far more skilfully than in the *Apollo and Marsyas*. There is an animation in their gestures and a firmness of design in the two groups of five disciples clustered round the ends of the table that foreshadow his later mastery of close grouping. The essence of the picture is a symmetry which Tintoretto was rarely to repeat in his long career. But, though the *pattern* of the picture lies two-dimensionally across the surface, the *conception* is in depth. The backs of the two disciples on the near side of the table and the climax of light on the tablecloth between them project one inwards to the focal point. It is the fact that the figure of Christ is thought of as being at a definite distance from the spectator that makes Tintoretto's conception essentially different from Leonardo's.

At this point one realizes that the command of space which Tintoretto had developed, partially in the fifties and fully in the sixties, can only be explained in terms of his new system of composition and his new manipulation of light. It was not enough merely to break through the picture-plane and the imaginary parallels that lay behind it. Some means of establishing a set of movements in any desired direction into and out of the picture had to be found. And the two obvious ways of indicating such movement are (*a*) by the grouping of objects and figures in such a way that they lead the eye forwards and backwards rather than from side to side—that their ground plan should be as important as their elevation; and (*b*) by the distribution of light in such a way that the light itself lies like a patterned cloth over the whole of this ground plan, establishing the distance from the eye of each object in the picture, and rarely—except for a special purpose—following the old rhythm of parallel bands set up by the picture-plane. Our analysis of space, after the middle of the sixteenth century, must



therefore include an analysis of composition and of light. The three are completely interrelated.

With Tintoretto, innovations in composition and explorations of light march side by side; but in general it would be true to say that by the time he reaches middle age the problems of composition have been completely solved, that his exploration of the possibilities of light never ceases, and that at the very end of his life, what he would have called composition in his early and middle years, had been almost superseded by light. Light, important though it is in the work of his maturity, tends to follow and explain structure: in the work of his old age it cuts across structure and contradicts it, evolving its own patterns and rhythms regardless of what it falls on.

The *Miracle of the Slave* (Pl. 3) was finished in April 1548. It has the air of a challenge by a young man putting forth the whole of his strength, and it is, for that reason, an uneasy, overstrained masterpiece. Seen in relation to his own later development it is still immature. Yet it has the effect of making all previous painting in Italy stylistically obsolete. It is the first baroque picture and, in spite of its manifest debt to Michelangelo and Raphael, it is a startling premonition of the seventeenth century. It is perhaps the only Tintoretto in which one detects a full-scale attempt to combine Michelangelo's sculptural drawing with Titian's surface-glow, yet what the modern eye sees in it is not so much a debt to the past as a signpost to the future.

It is worth while, with this in view, to examine the picture in some detail. At first glance it does not appear to be conceived on a new set of principles. It has, superficially, all the marks of the 'stage-picture.' One feels that the footlights would be revealed if the lower edge of the frame were to be dropped a few inches. The architectural background runs strictly parallel to them. The portico on the left and the throne on the right are conventional theatrical wings framing in the 'acting area.' There is even a 'border' of vine leaves at the top to conceal the upper edge of the 'skycloth.'

But within this conventional framework the new vision has begun to work. What looks, at first sight, like a group of spectators arranged in a convenient dome shape over the prostrate slave is really a crowd whose ground plan is a semicircle that is

led into at either side with a typical Tintoretto back view—the woman with her baby on the left, the soldier on the right. The essential movement of the group is one of leaning forward, bending over, peering down at the slave's body which cuts diagonally across and into the stage and carries the eye straight to the furthest members of the dense crowd. In the whole, packed canvas with its thirty life-size figures, there is only one who is not leaning into or out of the picture. Footlights and backcloth have been retained but the invisible hurdles between the two have disappeared; they are broken down partly by the disposition in depth of the mass of spectators and partly by the complete freedom, which each individual in the crowd seems to feel, for the first time in painting, to move or gesticulate towards or away from the spectator. One remembers Ridolfi's description of how Tintoretto, having acquired the casts of Michelangelo's recumbent figures, drew them from points of view that involved foreshortening, and one sees why. It was part of his deliberate assault on the picture-plane.

One other characteristic marks the picture as an essentially baroque composition. One of the tests of the classic method of building up a picture is that every important figure in it lives its own life, and would still retain its balance and significance if detached from its context. The classic work of art is a sum of parts. In fully fledged baroque the parts are so merged in the whole that they cannot be detached. In isolation they would be meaningless. A picture by Rubens or Rembrandt is so organized that its component parts are woven inextricably together.

Tintoretto has not quite reached that stage in the *Miracle of the Slave*. Three figures—the mother and child, the soldier already referred to, and the standing executioner with the broken hammer—are completely detachable. They certainly exist in their own right in the Michelangesque sense and only differ from Michelangelo in being a little more energetic in their gestures. And all that remains of the old system of linear composition, the system that leads the eye across but not into the picture, is the wild serpentine movement that starts at the top with the legs of the flying saint, runs down the swinging folds of the executioner's robe, is picked up by the diagonal of the nude slave's body and runs along the legs of the kneeling figure to his left. It cleaves the picture in two, like a flash of lightning. It is a stroke of genius, but it is also a

contradiction of the 'ground plan' system of composition, and it marks the picture as transitional. In one of Raphael's Vatican frescoes it would be entirely appropriate. Here it begins to be an anachronism. But through the rest of the crowd runs a single texture, an interdependence between part and whole that makes its resolution into single figures unthinkable. Note how, in a detail taken from the centre of the crowd (*see* Plate 3), portions of five figures are woven together. The hands move in and out, the light plays fitfully over the whole, taking no more account of the form than does the shadow of a cloud lying across the complexities of a mountain range.

This lighting scheme is quite evidently derived from one of Tintoretto's 'piccole case'—a relatively simple one—seen by artificial light. The lighting is completely logical and its impact is observed with wonderful accuracy. It strikes downwards from the right-hand side and penetrates half-way into the crowd; the left-hand figures are in the shadow of the right-hand wall of the box, with the exception of the seated soldier who leans back to catch it and whose torso is modelled with a sharpness of contrast that only occurs in artificial light. The light moves diagonally inwards to the left, diminishing as it recedes, hitting the bases of the columns, falling full on the shoulder of the standing woman, and the torso of the prostrate slave whose body is cut in two by the shadow of the executioner which then rises up the far side of the crowd, cutting arbitrarily across knuckles and sleeves, and loses itself in the tangled intricacies of the throng.

The far wall of the box has been detached and moved back so that it is fully illuminated, and gleams of reflected light from it are picked up by the shadowed capitals of the columns and the vine leaves.

The colour of the picture has been praised, I feel, beyond its deserts. It is brilliant and interesting but hardly memorable, for here again Tintoretto is not quite sure of himself. He has been too anxious to combine the glow and glitter of Venice with the grand gesture of Tuscany, and, in particular, too anxious that the resonance of his colour should not be lost in the general interplay between light and shadow. It is a brave attempt to achieve the impossible. The glow and glitter, far from intensifying the drama on which the picture depends, actually detract from it. Four figures remain in

the memory—the flying saint, the naked slave, and the two superb back views that mark the limits of the crowd. Their function is architectural, like the roof, the supporting pillars and the threshold of some marvellously constructed portico. To think of them structurally, as solid objects receiving the maximum amount of light in order to explain their structure, is evidently the key to the picture. To think of them as *patches* of colour is to weaken their significance. It is not possible to regard a picture both as an architectural structure and as a patchwork counterpane, and in these four figures Tintoretto does not even ask the spectator to do so. The rest of the crowd strikes an uneasy balance between structure and colour, between sculpture and painting. Rubens alone among later painters achieved this balance with any success. Both Watteau and Renoir had a strong sense of the architectural side of painting, but both, in the end, sacrificed it to their feeling for colour, as did Tintoretto's contemporary, Veronese. Rembrandt, more sensitive to colour than is generally realized, solved the problem by severely limiting his chromatic range. Tintoretto, after this magnificent attempt to make the best of two irreconcilable worlds, only returned to it in his smaller and more lyrical canvases.

Four years later he is evidently faced with a definite choice between the two worlds, and instead of trying to combine them, he experiments with each in turn, and in the end makes his decision. In 1552 he painted two formal votive pictures, one of *Saints Andrew and Jerome*, the other of *St. George and his Princess with St. Louis*. Between 1550 and 1553 he was at work on a series of paintings for the Scuola della Trinità, of which three are now in the Accademia at Venice—*The Temptation of Adam*, *The Creation of Animals*, *The Death of Abel*; another, *The Forbidden Apple*, is in the Uffizi; a fifth, *The Creation of Eve*, is lost. A comparison between the St. George alterpiece and the *Temptation of Adam* (Pl. 5) reveals Tintoretto's unsettled mind in his early thirties. The first is in the recognized tradition of Venetian altarpieces; the personages in the picture are effectively posed and satisfactorily balanced. There is little opportunity for drama and no attempt at it. On the right the dignified figure of St. Louis has the air of a noble figure from a late Bellini altarpiece brought up to date; on the left, the Princess leans back with so magnificent a gesture that one could almost swear that her male counterpart could be found among the seated athletes in the



Sistine Chapel ceiling. Between the two and linking them together with raised arms stands St. George. Apart from the Amazonian vigour of the Princess it is a typically Venetian conception, even to the rich shine on the armour. (A suit of black armour with red stockings appears in several pictures of this period, and may easily have been a studio property.) The even richer texture of the Princess's terracotta robe, with its flickering sheen of flame colour, reminds one of Veronese's handling of silks and satins, yet, since Veronese did not arrive in Venice until a year or two later, there can be little question of influence here. The only hints of the essential Tintoretto are the attempts to give a sense of space, in a picture which needs no space, by the Pordenonesque trick of making the broken spear and the dragon's head project, towards the spectator, over the edge of the architectural setting and, more important, the painting of the sky which, instead of hanging like a backcloth behind the Saints, encloses them, as though it were the inner surface of an immense globe. Here is the young Tintoretto, at his best, leaning heavily on the noble and aristocratic traditions of his time, competing successfully with his contemporaries and adding very little of his own.

But in the *Temptation of Adam*, as in the rest of the Scuola della Trinità series, Tintoretto begins, tentatively, to be himself. Ridolfi says expressly that the figures were drawn from life, and one can imagine that for the purpose of this initial step into unexplored country, Tintoretto would be careful to rely only on his own observation and on his rapidly developing imagination. The two figures are *not* effectively posed and satisfactorily balanced: they strike no graceful or powerful attitudes. Eve leans forward, Adam shrinks back, as though Tintoretto had no other thought than to reconstruct the drama of the Garden of Eden in his own studio. He has even given us the flat floor of the studio in the foreground and has perfunctorily turned the models' thrones into low brick walls. Charm and rhetoric have both been left behind. The world inhabited by these two strange figures is not shimmering with rich Venetian surfaces, and the spectator, instead of admiring it from afar as if it were the limited world of the stage, steps into it and shares it with its two occupants, not without a certain bewilderment. For it is decidedly not the untroubled world of Giorgione, and, in essence, it is very much the world of Rubens and Rem-

brandt. Naturally, it is not the world as they would have painted it—the hearty Rubens would have made it less sombre and the protestant Rembrandt less obviously romantic—but like their world, it is a world to be inhabited rather than admired. They, too, ask the spectator to join them. The footlights have vanished. Auditorium and stage are one in all baroque painting, or rather, the stage itself is a limitless area that includes the spectator himself. The landscape runs mysteriously in without a break. One is drawn into it past the two figures, past the dark spinney down a little valley and on to the mysterious glow in the sky at the extreme right. It is the baroque diagonal in depth which one finds in almost every Rubens landscape (and, curiously enough, Rubens almost always makes it run, as it does here, from left to right) crossed by the diagonal in breadth of the two figures. But even they are caught up in it. Put into Euclidean terms, a line joining Adam to Eve would, if produced, lead along the valley; the extended arm of Eve and the upper arm of Adam reinforce the same steep slant into the picture.

All over the landscape little lights flash, as though to guide the eye from point to point between the glowing surfaces of the two bodies to the glowing patch of sky in the distance. They are caught in the foliage, in a way that almost foreshadows Constable. There is even a little streak of light forcing its way between the two brick walls in the foreground.

This, though not Tintoretto at his most impressive, is the Tintoretto who points the way into the future. The St. George altarpiece is linked with the past, and for that very reason seems so much more assured. In the Adam and Eve picture Tintoretto has not so much abandoned Michelangelo and Titian as added to them unfamiliar elements of his own so that their contribution hardly counts. A careful examination of this and its companion picture, the *Death of Abel*, shows that all the figures were originally detached from their surroundings, bounded by a hard and continuous Michelangesque line, but that, as the painting proceeded, they began to melt into their surroundings. The line that marks the heavily shadowed left-hand side of Eve's torso is lost against the equally heavy shadow behind her; yet it is as definite as if Michelangelo himself had drawn it. In later life, Tintoretto learned to abandon this method of clinging to a contour until the moment when it

had to be jettisoned in the interests of *chiaroscuro*. If the bounding line was destined to be eaten away by light or lost in shadow it was hardly established at all. Or, to be more accurate, Tintoretto gradually developed the power to *think* in terms of light and shade. His later boundaries are not divisions between structures but between areas of light and shadow. Once he has reached this point in his development, the 'drawing of Michelangelo' has ceased to count.

In the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Pl. 17) in the Madonna dell' Orto (for which Tintoretto received final payment in 1556), the beginnings of the process can be seen. Tintoretto's daring in placing himself at the foot of the steps and in compelling the spectator to ascend them in imagination will be referred to later. Here it is the play of light on the figures that concerns us. The picture painted as the outside of the organ-doors, of which the inside panels are also to be found in the church, could only be seen when the doors were closed. Originally it must have been divided vertically down the centre. There is no question of each of the two halves being self-contained, yet, in designing its main structure and the all-important play of light, Tintoretto must have been conscious of the two equal halves. Vertical and horizontal lines stiffen it and each half has its own tonality, the right half flooded with light, broken by the dark mass of the woman and child in the foreground, the left half in deep shadow similarly broken by the old man with the beard, who moves into the light as he steps forward out of the picture. But the noteworthy feature of these patches of light and shadow is that they do not follow the structure of the figures: they are capricious. A patch of light insinuates itself under the woman's left arm and illuminates her hip. Her shoulders and left leg from the knee downwards catch the light, but the right arm which sweeps the spectator's eye from the foreground to the little figure of the Virgin at the focal point of the picture in the middle distance, is in strong shadow. This is the simplest early example of what afterwards became in Tintoretto's hands, a wonderfully subtle and complex system.

Tintoretto then produces three strange pictures in which the possibilities of deep recession are carried to extreme lengths. The *Marriage at Cana* (Pl. 16) in Santa Maria della Salute (1561), the *Removal of the Body of St. Mark* (Pl. 21) in the Accademia, and the

*Finding of the Body of St. Mark* (Pl. 20) in the Brera (both 1563) are more than essays in deep perspective. The first is a comparatively simple interior crowded with rows of figures in depth, and opened up at its farthest end by three arches and glimpses of a sky patterned with clouds. The second is a long empty piazza seen in the lurid light of a torrential thunderstorm in which the patterned pavement carries the eye back to another set of all-important archways, and an even more dramatic sky. The third, the strangest of all, is one of Tintoretto's most striking attempts to project one into space by a system of alternating bands of light and shadow, held in position by a brilliantly illuminated area in the foreground and a vivid burst of light in the extremest distance.

It would be wearisome to describe in detail the innumerable variations and refinements invented by Tintoretto, from this period onwards, on the theme of bands or areas of light *cutting across* organizations of figures in landscape or architectural settings. The Last Suppers in San Trovaso (Pl. 22) and San Polo in Venice (Pl. 23) are astonishing when one thinks of them as a counterpoint of light and structure. The interplay between the two conflicting elements is so firmly grasped that only when one tries to analyse them in terms of ground plan and lighting-plot does their complexity become apparent. These two pictures were probably painted in 1567 or 1568. By this time Tintoretto has perfected his method, though he has by no means exhausted its possibilities.

Those possibilities he had every opportunity of working out in the series of wall paintings in the great upper hall of the Scuola of San Rocco, which occupied most of his time between 1577 and 1581. This was the climax of his creative life, in which the earlier vision, which he had hitherto been trying to turn into a system, was used, not for its own sake, but for the sake of extracting new dramatic meanings from the New Testament subjects which were his theme in this series. But it is at this point that one must cease to speak of him as the inventor of a system which could be passed on to other painters. His particular *use* of the system in the San Rocco pictures is something that could not be passed on. It is the quintessence of the Tintorettesque, and is therefore not the concern of this chapter.

All one need say in this connection about his later development is that he consistently broadens his effects in the massing of light and



that he suggests the reality of space with more and more economy. Sometimes his whole picture is a dark area, with the lights flickering across it and into it, as in the *Washing of Feet*—a nocturne lit by a single torch—in the Sacristy of San Stefano (probably 1577). Sometimes a gentle dapple of shade plays across a radiant surface as in the *Three Graces* (Pl. 56) of the Anticollégio in the Ducal Palace (1578). Sometimes he constructs a huge silhouette that gathers together a complex distance or middle distance to be seen through it, as in the *Battaglia Corsara* in Madrid (about 1580). His invention is inexhaustible. Only in his very last years does the system begin to be a little inadequate for what he has to say.

The great *Paradiso* (Pl. 64) in the Ducal Palace (begun in 1588) is painted on an entirely different plan. Space and light are no longer interlocked. They are not even described. They are rather implied. But perhaps in a work on this vast scale no purely descriptive pictorial method would have served. There is, after all, a limit of size, beyond which the rules based on a human scale do not apply. It would be understandable if Tintoretto had found himself compelled to adopt an entirely new type of vision for the solution of this particular problem. But even after its completion, in the few years left to him, when he was making his final personal statement in the three pictures painted for San Giorgio Maggiore, one finds that he has outgrown his own innovations. The *Gathering of Manna* (Pl. 70) is, in its groupings and spacings, typical of Tintoretto, but in its general texture it is not. Still less so is the *Last Supper* (Pl. 69). Glancing back at the *Last Supper* of San Polo, of twenty-two years earlier, one realizes that here, at last, light obeys no laws but becomes a mysterious independent element, a mystical possession of the canvas itself. It is not a physical condition imposed from without but a symbolic phosphorescence that exudes from within and passes like X-rays through matter and space alike.

## *Chapter Five*

### EARLY YEARS AND PATTERN OF DEVELOPMENT

FEW great men have provided their biographers with less spectacular material than Jacopo Robusti. Ridolfi has a nose for gossip, but try as he will he fails to make his hero's life seem colourful or even picturesque. Tintoretto was born in Venice, and apart from a few days spent in Mantua, as guest of Duke Federigo, for the purpose of installing his eight historic canvases in the Palace of the Gonzagas, he seems never to have left it. Attempts have been made to prove, on the slenderest of evidence, that he must have travelled to Rome. But they are largely based on an unwillingness to believe that so universal a genius could have been fostered by so parochial an environment. The fact is that genius of Tintoretto's kind requires the minimum of stimulus. It is like a coiled spring that can be released by a touch, and the kind of touch that Tintoretto needed to release his dynamic creative powers was certainly available in Venice in the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Moreover, if the supposed journey to Rome took place at all, it must have happened in his early youth. The flavour in his painting which critics would like to think could not have occurred without direct contact with Central Italy, had already appeared while he was still in his twenties, and while he was still precariously fighting for recognition in a city whose artists were notoriously competitive. The journey, if it occurred, was certainly not undertaken to execute a commission; and it is unlikely that he would leave Venice in his twenties merely to enlarge his artistic experience.

Little is known of the incidents of his private life. Ridolfi has collected a few anecdotes to illustrate his character. Taken together, they suggest a man of rather alarming integrity, vigorous, irritable, impatient, tactless, inarticulate, fundamentally kind especially as a father, but above all, determined at all costs to secure the kind of

commission that he felt himself most capable of carrying out. Like Rembrandt and Shakespeare he only interests us as a man because his outpouring of himself in his art is so astonishing. The smallest trifles that can be gleaned about his life have an acquired value. The vast corpus of his work needs a human background to explain it; otherwise Tintoretto becomes an impersonal force and no more. "What porridge had John Keats?" is a relevant question. But Keats did, at least, leave records of his human self. He was just as likely to tell his Fanny what porridge he had as to explain to her that a thing of beauty was a joy for ever. Tintoretto, more or less illiterate, and in any case the least literary of great artists, has left us hardly any records apart from his paintings.

Much of Ridolfi's gossip, usually entertaining and sometimes revealing, is worth repeating. He relates how, after the delivery of the *Miracle of the Slave* to the Confraternity of St. Mark, the brethren hesitated to hang their remarkable new picture. Whereupon Tintoretto took it back to his studio and only returned it at their urgent request.

The story of his surprising delivery of the completed panel for the oval centrepiece in the ceiling of the Albergo of the Scuola of San Rocco, when the other competing artists had, as usual, only prepared preliminary sketches, is typical. But still more so was his insistence that if it were refused by the Confraternity he would make a personal offering of it to the Saint himself, which, under the constitution of the Scuola, could not be refused. Ridolfi also records Tintoretto's refusal to accept the full payment offered to him by the Senate for the *Paradiso* in the Ducal Palace, and his insistent and eventually successful demands to the Republic for permission to paint a large picture of the Battle of Lepanto, for which the commission had already been given to Titian.

During the preparation of the battle scenes for Mantua he was often visited by the Duke, who insisted on his accompanying the completed pictures to Mantua to supervise their installation in the Palace. Tintoretto refused to move from Venice unless he were allowed to take his wife and family with him.

On the occasion of the visit of Henry III to Venice in 1574, Tintoretto, determined to paint the King's portrait, disguised himself as one of the Doge's bodyguard and made preparatory sketches on board the state barge, the *Bucentauro*, which had been

sent to meet the royal visitor. He refused the knighthood offered to him by the king on the completion of the portrait.

Ridolfi alternates his stories of Tintoretto's curious attitude of nervous bullying towards his patrons with others of his sarcastic comments on the work of contemporary artists, of his secretiveness and his refusal to admit visitors to the studio or to allow anyone to pester him while he was at work. He records his wife's attempts to make him dress respectably in the toga of the Cittadinanza and Jacopo's boorish determination to frustrate her; and Jacopo's brusqueness towards his friends and such of his family as were not working in the studio. 'To all your questions the answer is NO,' is the complete text of one of his letters to his brother who had asked, among other things, whether their mother had died. His rough and ready impulsiveness, his habit of giving his paintings to anyone who genuinely admired them, his horror of finding himself under an obligation to anyone—all this is related by his admiring biographer with obvious relish. Ridolfi builds up a completely credible character, fully rounded and with very few surprises. He is the type of successful self-made man who never doubts his own powers, but is never quite sure that others will recognize them; conscious of his own lack of polish but determined never to try to disguise it. 'He had a pleasant and grateful nature,' says Ridolfi, 'and a strong sense of humour which allowed him to crack jokes even with great men.' One suspects that Tintoretto was rather careful to crack jokes with great men in order to prove to himself that he was no snobbish respecter of persons.

One rather touching and surprising neurosis is hinted at—his dread of being buried alive. 'He died a good Christian, and made his sons Domenico and Marco promise to leave him unburied for three days. He knew that sick people sometimes seem dead when they are only in a coma.'

There is no reason to doubt Ridolfi's general estimate of his character. It rings true precisely because it is untypical of the age. Rough diamonds with a certain degree of deliberately uncouth eccentricity were commoner in the eighteenth century than in the sixteenth. Boswell's pride in Johnson's lack of external polish seems more normal than Ridolfi's account of the curious personality of his hero. For that very reason, one feels, Ridolfi's anecdotes are authentic. Their very triviality makes them credible.



Concerning the events of his life the available material is even more trivial and the records even sparser. Even the document recording his birth perished when the archives of the parish of San Polo were burned. The record of his death on the 31st of May, 1594, kept in San Marziale, states that his age was seventy-five years and eight months. He was therefore born at the end of September or beginning of October 1518. Of his boyhood and youth—the early encouragement from his parents to draw in charcoal and to use his father's dyes for paint, the account of his abortive apprenticeship with Titian, his subsequent insistence on self-education, and the details of his lost experiments in fresco-painting—there is no account but Ridolfi's.

The first definite news of him in contemporary records is that on the 22nd of May, 1539, at the age of twenty-one, he was living in the Campo San Cassiano near the little bridge that leads to S. Maria Mater Domini, and that he was already an independent artist. The wording 'Mistro Giacomo Depentor' suggests that he was not yet known by his familiar title. In 1544 he is still at the same address and is referred to as the son of Baptista the dyer. In February of the following year he has delivered the *Apollo and Marsyas* and a lost *Mercury and Argus* to Pietro Aretino who thanks him in a flattering letter. 'Your two Histories . . . painted, one might say, in less time than it took you to think what to paint, in the alcove of my room—to the great satisfaction of myself and of everyone else . . . since one often finds that speed and imperfection go together, it is a pleasure to find that the speedy is also the good. Quickness of execution depends on knowing what one is doing.'

Nothing is known of the origin of these two early paintings. It is unlikely that Aretino commissioned them. It is interesting to learn that Tintoretto chose the subjects himself and significant that both myths are indirectly connected with music. Vasari mentions his love of music and Ridolfi remarks that he played the lute 'and other strange instruments of his own invention.' Ridolfi's insistence on Tintoretto's habit of begging for commissions, and of offering his work in return for a bare payment of expenses or for a price which his contemporaries must have regarded as unscrupulous undercutting, is confirmed by numerous records. Some of his work in the Ducal Palacé and all of it at the Scuola

of San Rocco was executed at absurdly low prices. In his youth one can understand his anxiety to have his work shown in public (Ridolfi mentions that he exhibited portraits in the informal open-air exhibitions held in the Merceria and implies that to do so was enterprising but a trifle undignified) and, in his maturity, his passionate desire to secure the kind of commissions for which he felt himself particularly suited. But in any case his simple tastes and his modest way of life, combined with an extraordinary vitality and inexhaustible capacity for hard work made him the least grasping of men. It is not unlikely, in the case of Aretino's pictures, that he was anxious to exchange a sample of his work, placed in a house frequented by connoisseurs, for one of those testimonials that the 'Scourge of Princes' seldom wrote unless he could secure adequate payment in kind.

Judging from the number of portraits painted by Tintoretto at every period in his career, from the comparatively high prices he charged for them and from their very uneven quality and the perfunctory execution of some of them, one guesses that he regarded portrait painting as an easy way of making an adequate living in the intervals between the commissions on which his heart was set. There are magnificent exceptions, but in general, no great painter capable of fine portraiture has left behind such a gallery of uninspired portraits. Yet his average charge of twenty ducats for a portrait is quite out of proportion to the money he received for some of his most famous canvases. For example, the ten wall pictures for the huge upper room at the Scuola of San Rocco and nearly half of the ceiling panels were painted in a space of five years (1577-81) at a salary of one hundred ducats a year, including the price of all colours except ultramarine. It is difficult to estimate the value of the ducat in terms of to-day's currency, but it would be very roughly true to say that in purchasing power it was equivalent to about three pounds.

Aretino mentions, both in the letter already quoted, and in a later letter (on the subject of the *Miracle of the Slave*) the speed at which Tintoretto habitually painted. Certainly he was one of those artists who are at their best when they are working under pressure of a strong creative impulse in a fury of impatience. His handwriting both in his paintings and his drawings has a careless, inelegant urgency that had never been seen in art before his time.

The slowly built-up enamel-like surface characteristic of all previous Venetian painting was not outside his range. He could achieve it whenever it was necessary—as in the four Mythologies of the Anticollegio which were painted to be seen at close quarters and in a strong light, or in the *St. George* of the National Gallery. But, in general, the beauty of surface habitual with the Bellinis and the early Titian, and the elegance of swift handwriting that was one of Veronese's most delectable characteristics, are deliberately sacrificed by him as being useless for his more serious purposes. The more he is moved by the implications of the theme itself, the more urgent—the more uncouth, one might almost say—becomes the individual brush stroke. All the purely decorative qualities so dear to Venetian painting are jettisoned when he tackles the profound themes in the Upper Room at San Rocco.

In the little Aretino picture (Pl. 1), however, there is no profundity, and it is surprising to note this early example of Tintorettesque impatience in a mythological subject. Corrections and afterthoughts, lightly brushed over the original paint (note, for example, the double foot of the nearest seated figure) have become semi-transparent with the passage of time, revealing Tintoretto's way of improvising as he worked. These pentimenti were probably invisible in Aretino's lifetime, but the canvas, compared with any picture of the same date by Titian, must always have had the air of a felicitous improvisation and Aretino must have felt himself forced to choose between praising Tintoretto for his impetuosity and rejecting the picture as being altogether too unconventional. Incidentally, Coletti shrewdly notes that Aretino only praised Tintoretto when Titian was absent from Venice.

This early example of Tintoretto's fiery impatience is not repeated in the works of the next few years. More important commissions seem to have induced in him a rather sober frame of mind, and if the development of his genius is to be traced at all, it becomes necessary to consider with some care the dating of his works from 1545 onwards.

It is not pedantic to attempt to place an artist's works in chronological order, though it is an exercise that pedants find particularly attractive, for they tend to regard it as a sort of exercise in detection, an end in itself instead of a means of following the gradual unfolding of a human soul by a process of experiment and rejection.



When artists of the calibre of Titian, Tintoretto or Turner address themselves to each successive task, they are acutely conscious of their equipment at every stage in their past development. They have analysed their own achievements; they know just how much of the experience gained in previous experiments will help them with their present problem, and to what extent it will be necessary to make yet another tentative journey into the unknown.

To find out in what sequence those experimental journeys were made, which of them led to a new discovery, or to an enlargement of their available means of expression and which of them proved unprofitable; which of them were the result of a temporary mood or inspiration and which were a part of the steady pattern of the artist's evolution, is important. If art historians were to discover that the *Last Supper* of San Giorgio Maggiore had been painted before the *Last Supper* of San Trovaso, one's whole conception of Tintoretto's purpose as an artist, his ambitions, his changing attitude to the physical and the spiritual world would have to be revised.

The accurate dating of many of Tintoretto's paintings is particularly difficult. The dated paintings are few. Documents establishing dates are comparatively rare, and, since Tintoretto is a 'timeless' painter, it is not always easy to deduce dates from internal evidence. Stylistic evidence is misleading, for Tintoretto was, by force of circumstance, a stylistic opportunist. Ridolfi mentions that he was able to paint in any style, but to assume that he passed through definite stylistic phases and, on the strength of that assumption, to assign any undated picture to the group of dated pictures which it most resembles, is to beg the whole question—to discover the pattern of development by assuming a pattern of development. Could any two pictures come from more utterly different worlds than the *Washing of Feet* in the Sacristy of the church of San Stefano, undated but probably painted in 1577, with its more than Rembrandtesque mystery and gloom, and the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (Pl. 53) of the Ducal Palace, certainly finished in 1578, one of the most delectable and optimistic pictures ever painted?

The truth is that Tintoretto, the self-made painter, was readier than almost any other great artist to take any hint from any source that suited him at any moment. In the case of Raphael, who was even more susceptible, one feels that his 'influences'



struck deeper, were digested more completely, and were therefore more permanent. But Tintoretto could at any moment produce echoes of Titian, or Schiavone, of Pordenone, of Bonifazio, of Veronese, without being one whit the less himself. These echoes were capricious. They may have lasted no longer than a few days. They were no more significant than the literary clichés that a passionately serious but unfastidious writer would adopt as a result of yesterday's contact with his inferiors. To speak, as some critics have done, of a 'Pordenonesque interlude' or of a 'Veronesian phase' is merely to give oneself an excuse for assigning an undated picture that contains Pordenonesque or Veronesesque characteristics to the same date as a similar picture that can be firmly dated.

Yet these switchback variations of style and mood—dictated mainly by Tintoretto's sense of the appropriate: in the Ducal Palace he is always rhetorical, at San Rocco he is always profound—are all contained within the larger, steadier pattern of his development. Ultimately, his style is the outward expression of a frame of mind that underwent considerable changes in the long progress from Aretino's little boudoir picture of 1545 to the final *Entombment* of San Giorgio Maggiore, of 1594, the year of his death. What is a surer guide in tracing his development is the gradual broadening of his scope, the slowly increasing power to fuse together the various and often bewilderingly complex elements in his pictures into a single pictorial whole. This kind of development—which in music, corresponds to the broader sweep of phrasing that is almost always the sign of a mature composer—continues throughout his life, irrespective of his stylistic experiments and of the temporary influence of this or that contemporary painter.

Even less than of most great artists who achieve maturity over a long period of years, is it possible to speak of him as having an early, middle, and later period. With Tintoretto, there are no phases, no critical moments when he seems to review his past achievement, and, finding it inadequate to his new needs, alters his approach and gives a new twist to the quality of his own vision.

On the other hand there are many moments in his life when his whole mood changes, not as a result of ripening experience but of an unerring sense of the demands of the moment. Thus, if one divides painting, for the sake of convenience, into 'decorative' on the one hand and 'expressionist' on the other, one usually

finds that artists, in their maturer years, become less decorative—less concerned with the charming, the superficially attractive—and more expressionist—more obsessed with the exact expression of a state of mind. Hence the temptation to divide their work, chronologically, into stylistic periods. With Tintoretto such a chronological division is almost impossible. He can be decorative or expressionist at will at any moment of his life. Even in the year of his death he was painting two pictures so different in mood that it seems scarcely credible that both could have been conceived by the same imaginative mind, and fantastically improbable that both could have been conceived in the same year. The *Gathering of Manna* is a serene, idyllic reconstruction of the golden age in the mood of Vergil's *Georgics*, or Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony*. The *Last Supper* is sinister, dark and mysterious as the second act of Wagner's *Siegfried*. Yet these differences, though striking, are superficial. Both pictures could only have been envisaged by a man who had spent a lifetime in the practice of his craft and in the steady accumulation of experience.

The only divisions, therefore, that need be observed in an account of Tintoretto's development, are divisions imposed on him from without, caused by the almost accidental order of the tasks which were entrusted to him or which he voluntarily undertook. The central, the vital period of his life was, of course, the period of twenty-three years during which almost everything he did was done for the Scuola of San Rocco. All other work during that time, from 1564 to 1587 (and there was a considerable amount of it) was done so to speak, in parentheses. This period of twenty-three years can be subdivided into two, with a gap of two years between the finishing of the upper and the beginning of the lower hall. The years between his first-known picture and the beginning of the San Rocco period may be divided again, rather arbitrarily into two sections. The decade from 1545 to 1555 one could, perhaps, call his formative years, the years in which he was establishing his repertoire of styles and moods.

The years between 1556 and 1563 are less consistent and relatively less crowded, but they contain masterpieces like the two huge vertical paintings in the choirs of the *Madonna dell' Orto* and the three famous *St. Mark* pictures in the *Accademia*.

After the completion of the Scuola, Tintoretto had only seven

years to live. They were busy years even though, by this time, much of his work must have been carried out by his sons and assistants. But whoever applied the paint to the canvas—and in work on this scale personal handwriting no longer counts for much—the *planning* was still Tintoretto's own. Those seven years saw the initiation and completion of his largest single painting, the *Paradiso* in the Ducal Palace, and the pictures in San Giorgio Maggiore which mark the end of his career.

But to return to the known facts. By March 1548, Tintoretto had moved across the Grand Canal into the parish of S. Marcilian, for in the document recording a payment of twenty ducats on account for the altarpiece of the parish church, he is referred to as 'Maestro Giacomo,' a description which would only be used of a parishioner.

In 1550—but the exact date is not known: it may have been a year or two later—he married Faustina de Vescovi, a daughter of a minor patrician, whose family was of Brescian descent. Faustina, who was about twenty years younger than her husband, emerges from Ridolfi's pages as a hard-headed, practical, unimaginative woman, conscious of having married beneath her, anxious that Jacopo should not disgrace her family by behaving in public as a 'popolano,' thrifty, an excellent and careful mother to their three sons and five daughters. To us her true character is of as little account as that of Saskia or Anne Hathaway. Ridolfi, quite naturally, saw her as a shadowy, necessary figure, neither helping nor hindering in the incessant production of masterpieces that went on around her. The only first-hand evidence we possess of Jacopo's attitude to her is the passage in his will: 'I desire that my beloved wife, Madonna Faustina Episcopi, should take full charge of my household and property and be in complete control [governatrice] of my sons and daughters.' This is not, one feels, mere legal phraseology. 'Voglio che la carissima mia consorte . . . sia donna e madonna, patrona ed usufruttuaria de tutto il mio' has an emphasis that suggests unusual affection and confidence.

In 1554—out of such insignificant facts must the biographer of such a man build up his story—he was living in the same parish but had moved to the house of one Baldassare dei Mastelli and was paying a yearly rent of forty-two ducats.



The history of Jacopo's family of three sons and five daughters (for more detailed information see an article by Rodolfo Gallo in *Ateneo Veneto*, March–April, 1941, p. 73) is briefly as follows.

His first and favourite child, Marietta, was born soon after his marriage. Ridolfi, whose dates must always be accepted with caution, says she was born in 1560, but Borghini's earlier date of 1555 is far more probable. She was a lively girl, musical and artistic. Under a Neapolitan teacher she studied the clavicembalo, the lute and other instruments. Under her father's tuition she became an excellent portrait painter, though no authenticated portrait by her is known. At Jacopo's request she dressed in boy's attire. Even after her marriage, in 1578, to the jeweller, Mario Augusta, she used to sit with her father in the evenings playing to him while he worked. She became one of his regular studio assistants and when she was called away from Venice to paint portraits at the Court of the Austrian Emperor and of Philip II of Spain, Jacopo refused to let her go. She died in 1590. One cannot help guessing that the slackening of Jacopo's 'fury for work' to which Ridolfi refers at this date, was partly due to his grief at her death.

About Giovanni Battista, Jacopo's eldest son, hardly anything is known. He was certainly a painter, and equally certainly untalented. Drawings by him are mentioned in the wills of one or two members of the family, but he cannot have taken much part in the labours of the family *bottega*. He died in Padua in 1593.

In 1562 Domenico was born, the best known of his father's workshop assistants and indeed the only one who achieved any considerable reputation as an independent painter. He inherited the *bottega* on his father's death in 1594, but seems to have worked in Ferrara and Mantua between 1594 and 1599. He died in 1635.

Marco, who also became his father's assistant, was born in the following year. His career as a painter in the family tradition is completely overshadowed by that of his elder brother. Moreover, one deduces from a phrase in Faustina's will that he eventually became the black sheep of the family—'since he has not followed the right path, his share in the house must be dependent on his neither selling nor mortgaging it.' He died 'of gout' in 1637, at the age of seventy-six.

Of the four younger daughters, Pierina was born in 1562 and



died at the ripe age of eighty-four. Ottavia was born eight years later. Pierina entered the Benedictine nunnery of St. Amia di Castello. She became a skilful needlewoman and together with another of her sisters (probably Alturia) made an embroidered copy of Jacopo's San Rocco *Crucifixion* which eventually passed into the possession of the Austrian Emperor and now belongs to the Viennese State Collection. There were two younger daughters, Laura, born in 1585, and Alturia of whom nothing at all is known beyond the fact that she was still alive in 1645.

The later history of Ottavia is interesting since it involves Sebastian Casser, an artist whose parents came from the Altdorf district of Switzerland and who became Domenico's assistant. We find Casser in Venice in 1615 at the age of sixteen: he attached himself to the Tintoretto *bottega* two years later, first as a part-time assistant, and later (after 1621) it is recorded that he took all his meals with the family. Domenico, in a will drawn up in 1630, bequeathed to him a good deal of the studio furniture, including drawings and casts. A love affair with a certain Maddelena, a shop-keeper, who had two children by him, seems to have involved him in a secret double life, and it was not until 1639 that he surprisingly married Ottavia, then a woman of nearly seventy. The marriage is puzzling, and one can only conclude that it was an attempt on Ottavia's part to preserve the solidarity of the family tradition and to bestow on Casser the prestige of being able to call himself the great man's son-in-law, and even of assuming his name, now that Domenico and Marco were no longer alive.

In view of this strange alliance between an elderly woman in failing health and a painter in the prime of his life, it is interesting to note the wording of Ottavia's will. In it she recalls the promise made to her two brothers, Domenico and Marco, that she would not marry her elder brothers' assistant until they had pronounced him a worthy painter; and their decision that in view of his talents as a painter, and in particular as a portrait painter, they would allow their sister's marriage to take place. The marriage, as the will suggests, was almost tantamount to the bestowal on Casser of the whole responsibility of the family business. It justified Ottavia in bequeathing to Sebastian, at her death, the collection of her father's drawings. Ottavia's insistence that the marriage was no more than the fulfilment of a promise made, years before,

to her brothers, is an index of the importance, to her, of the dynastic tradition of the studio. Casser had already been in the employment of the two brothers for eighteen years at the time of Domenico's death, and one would have thought that they would, by that time, have been satisfied as to his ability. Ottavia's will makes him sole heir to all the drawings and models in the studio on condition of his not marrying again. Ottavia died seven years after the marriage. Casser lived on till 1679 in full possession of the house on the Fondamenta dei Mori. A contemporary writer describes his visit to the house, where Casser, now an old man, was living alone with his illegitimate son Angelo. With Casser's death the Tintoretto *bottega* came to an end. The big house on the Fondamenta dei Mori ceased, for the first time in over a hundred years, its output of works of art.

The solidarity of family businesses was a typical feature of Renaissance Venice. Nothing quite like it is to be found in the cultural life of other Italian cities of the period, where tradition was rooted rather in the studio itself than in the personality of its owner. In Venice, the Vivarini produced three generations of painters, the sons of Jacopo Bellini used their father's sketch-books as quarries for pictorial ideas, Veronese's sons signed their pictures 'Haeredes Paoli' after their father's death. The Bassano and Zuccaro families were equally closely bound together into unofficial partnerships.

But even in Venice, the sense of family solidarity in the Tintoretto household must have been exceptional. With the increasing size of the canvases to be covered, the necessity for competent studio assistants must have been more imperative than ever before. The fashion for larger altarpieces had been set by a new architectural conception of the function of an altarpiece and finally established by Titian's great *Assumption*, painted for the Frari in the year of Tintoretto's birth. In addition, there was a demand for larger wall and ceiling panels in the Ducal Palace, especially after the disastrous fire of 1577 that gutted much of the interior and destroyed so many earlier paintings. And a man of Tintoretto's home-loving temperament must have felt the need of a smoothly running studio routine in order to carry out the purely physical demands of the enormous tasks he undertook.

Jacopo's own will, dated 30th May, 1594, the day before his death, is normal in that it regards the studio as a going concern to be carried on by his eldest son. 'I order all my property, as far as appertains to my profession, to go to my son Domenico on condition, however, that all this professional material be used in common with him and my son Marco, as long as they remain together as brothers should. I also order my son Domenico to complete with his own hand my unfinished works and to employ in this task the same pains that he used to bestow on many of my works.'

Clearly the artistic and the domestic activities of the family were sharply divided. Faustina remained head of the household and its financial arrangements, while Domenico was in complete charge of the productive side of the family business.

Very little is known about the conduct of Tintoretto's workshop, how many assistants he had at any given time, or what their precise function was. Marietta could not have been of much help to her father until, at the earliest, the year 1570. Domenico and Marco would become apprentices five or six years later. Sebastian Casser did not enter the studio till after Jacopo's death. He became Domenico's apprentice in 1617. But certain other assistants from Northern Europe, known to have worked under Tintoretto at various periods, are probably responsible for a distinctly northern flavour in many of Tintoretto's landscape backgrounds and for a certain prosaic harshness in the still-life accessories in some of the later pictures. Martin de Vos and Paolo Franceschi (also called Paolo Fiammingo, who died in Venice in 1596), are both mentioned by Ridolfi as assistants. Other northern artists who worked with Tintoretto are Hans Rottenhamer and Peter Ulerick who was in the workshop in 1560.

Such lists of names have very little meaning. They indicate that the studio was a busy one, but in the case of so prolific a painter that hardly needs proof. For the purpose of filling in architectural backgrounds or the large areas of almost mechanical painting required in the huge Ducal Palace pictures, a minimum of skill was required. At no time in his career did Tintoretto need assistants with the technical accomplishment required by successful painters of half a century earlier. The broader manner of painting of the middle and late sixteenth century, and the larger areas to be

covered, gave rise to a new workshop system in which the master controlled the design, dictated the method and supplied working drawings, but could leave a good deal of the execution to assistants without serious loss in the quality of the finished painting. Tintoretto, even more than Rubens, could afford to run his workshop on factory lines whenever the necessity arose for covering large areas of canvas at high speed. When one imagines a painting for which Jacopo himself had prepared the rough pen-and-wash sketch in chiaroscuro together with squared-up drawings for individual figures, while Domenico, Marco or Marietta had undertaken at least the laying in of the figures, Paolo Franceschi or some other Northern European apprentice had done the backgrounds and still-life accessories, and unknown apprentices had filled in areas of sky, cloud or architecture, the phrase 'workshop painting' ceases to have a precise meaning. To such pictures Jacopo himself would certainly add finishing touches like the bravura passages that one finds in the background of the Scuola of San Rocco *Baptism* and *Adoration of the Magi*. Smaller pictures like the *Susanna*, the Anti-collegio allegories, the National Gallery *St. George*, and the finest portraits, must be by his own hand. But to attribute a particular painting, or a particular passage in a painting, to a given member of the workshop without documentary evidence is at present impossible, and will remain so until more is known about the personal style of Tintoretto's assistants and especially of his sons and his daughter.

When young Jacopo left Titian's studio after his ten-days' apprenticeship, he also severed himself from the whole of the Titian circle and its complex social and political ramifications. Venice, in the sixteenth century, was the centre of immense diplomatic activity. In fact Venice may be said to have invented the European system of international diplomacy. Titian, caught up in the complex machinery of contacts between the courts of Europe, found himself involved in constant journeys not only to Cortona, Mantua, Urbino, and Rome, but also further afield to Germany in much the same way as did Rubens, a century later, though in a less official capacity. Tintoretto was never tempted away from Venice, nor in Venice were his friendships or his interests political.

His temperament was, in any case, non-political, and his intensely narrow Venetian patriotism led him to put all his gifts at the dis-



posal of the Senate, in the decoration of the Ducal Palace, of the Scuole—those peculiarly Venetian institutions which will be described later (see Chapter 8, p. 112)—and of the church. Thus his reputation remained, during his lifetime, largely local. The number of paintings executed as commissions for churches or princes outside Venice was comparatively small.

It is noteworthy that an artist so dedicated to the practice of painting in oils on canvas should have accepted so many commissions for preparing mosaic cartoons for the Basilica of St. Mark, which, be it remembered, was not the Cathedral of Venice, but the Chapel of the Doges. The first record of his connection with the schemes of mosaic decoration for St. Mark's is in 1563 when he served on a jury, together with Veronese and Sansovino, for selecting designers and mosaicists. In 1568 he made his first mosaic cartoon for the Basilica and between that date and 1592, two years before his death, he was constantly supplying designs.

For this and for his work for the Doge's Palace, he was evidently willing at any time to serve the Republic. But his connection with the Scuola of San Rocco was closer and more intimate than that of a semi-official painter. His extraordinary anxiety to devote his energies as a painter to the Scuola will be described later. But he must have felt that even this was not enough. He wished to take a hand in its administration. In 1565 he was elected among the 'decani de tutt' anno' (permanent vice-presidents) of the Scuola. In the following year he was chosen as one of its two 'sindaci' ('chairman' is probably the nearest equivalent). In 1580 he was co-opted on to its central executive committee, and served on it at intervals until 1587.

This was the only part Jacopo played in the active life of Venice; for the rest, his material life centred around the hearth and the studio, while his spiritual life, as revealed in his painting, was far more deeply religious than that of any of his contemporaries.

Like Michelangelo, his attitude to Christianity was passionate and serious. In common with all artists of the High Renaissance, the material nobility of Paganism was part of his natural inheritance, and when called upon he could produce pagan mythologies as joyous and even as sumptuous as Veronese and as sensuous as Titian. But pagan radiance was certainly not the underlying force behind his greatest work. In that he resembles Michelangelo,

though the two men were fundamentally different in their temperamental approach to Christianity. Michelangelo's was one of tragic nobility, Tintoretto's, encouraged by the growing influence of the Jesuits, was both more mystical and more optimistic. The distinction between the two can be seen, in its superficial aspect, in Tintoretto's subject-matter. His favourite theme—one might almost say his obsession—is the miracle. In electing to spend so many years of his life in working for the Scuola of the Plague Saint, San Rocco, he was in reality proclaiming his belief in healing, in the cleansing and purifying aspect of religion. And it is worth noting that while the beneficent power of the Saint himself is the subject-matter of the pictures he painted for the church of San Rocco a few yards away, for his subject-matter in the Scuola, Tintoretto takes the wider theme of miracle and healing in the Old and New Testaments. One would have expected the reverse. Carpaccio had told the story of St. Ursula, and Tintoretto himself had told the story of St. Mark in the Scuola pictures of their respective saints. But here, in his maturity, he chose a wider theme and used the Bible as his text. And in forming an estimate of Jacopo's character this intensely serious optimism is perhaps the most important evidence we have. That is what makes him so much more dramatic, so much less lyrical than Titian.

In 1574 his father-in-law, Marco dei Vescovi, bought the house on the Fondamenta dei Mori (now No. 3399) into which Jacopo and his family moved at once, and in which he lived till his death twenty years later. It is a large, rambling house, a hundred yards from the church of the Madonna dell'Orto which already contained three of his most memorable pictures, and in which he is buried, in the vault of the Vescovi family. It was not the only property he possessed as his fortunes increased. Four years before he moved into the house, he had already purchased a small estate on the mainland, the Villa di Camenzaga, and six years later he exchanged it for a more convenient country house, the Villa di Campanedo, near Mestre, to which he was in the habit of retiring for a few days whenever he felt in need of a rest. Faustina, on the death of her brother, in 1584, inherited another house at Zelarino.

It often happens with a man of stupendous originality, that the fame he acquires during his lifetime, however resplendent, is not

quite the fame he deserves. Posterity can form a surer estimate of his character as well as of his stature. I would, for example, trust the cumulative picture of the pre-Raphaelites that Sir Max Beer-bohm produced in *Rossetti and his Circle*. I would not feel half so confident in a caricaturist who was a friend and contemporary of the Group.

It is for that reason that Pianta's extraordinary carved caricature in the upper room of the Scuola seems to sum up Tintoretto more completely than any of the painter's own self-portraits. The weight of a century of posthumous judgment is contained in the portrait. Pianta's own extravagant genius, as well as his resourceful craftsmanship, can be seen in the carved allegorical figures that were introduced into the panelled surround of the room in the middle of the seventeenth century. But in this portrait he has surpassed himself in skill and insight. Hunched awkwardly on his stool, surrounded by pestle and mortar and a litter of brushes, clumsily grasping a roll of drawings, the old painter sits brooding as though he had momentarily forgotten his ungainly body and the implements of his trade. The huge head is that of a visionary Socrates—a philosopher who had outgrown philosophy in attempting to penetrate beyond the boundaries of truth itself. The wrinkled brow, the sad, protuberant eyes, wearied with searching; the clenched jaws, the lips pursed with the effort, all suggest Tintoretto's uneasy, titanic imagination. The very uncouthness of the head, the brows and cheeks craggy and wrinkled, the short ugly nose, the mouth and chin lost in a tangle of beard, add to the impression of rugged grandeur. The portrait fills in the gaps in Ridolfi's lively but pedestrian account. This, surely, is in truth the little dyer, the half-educated son of the people, graceless, unpolished, his soul burning through his harrowed eyes, in the grip of a stupendous vision, his paints and brushes ready to hand, waiting for the moment when the vision shall have become tangible enough for him to attack his canvas; ready, when the moment arrives, to spring into an impatient fury of activity.





## PART II



## Chapter Six

### THE FORMATIVE DECADE, 1545-55

THE earliest dated painting by Tintoretto is a *Sacra Conversazione*, in the Leger collection, London, signed 'Iachobus . . . 1540,' with a diagrammatic wheel inserted between the name and the date. This has led von Hadeln to attribute the picture to an otherwise unknown artist, Jacopo Molino. The handling of the paint is undistinguished and clumsy and the draperies are coarse and blanket-like, but the eager, restless movement that animates the picture was outside the scope of any other artist in 1540. The presence of a feebly imagined St. Francis on the right of the group, evidently a later addition, throws into relief the vitality of the rest. The Madonna's pose is a palpable echo of Michelangelo's Medicean Madonna from the New Sacristy of San Lorenzo in Florence, but the Child in her lap sprawls sideways with wildly extended arms, a precursor of the goddess in the National Gallery's *Origin of the Milky Way*. One can hardly doubt its authenticity, but the picture is only precious for its evidence of Tintoretto's style at the age of 22. It combines the breadth and the grasp of a mature artist attacking a large and ambitious composition, with the hesitance and inexperience of a boy in his late teens. Not till five years later does another dated picture appear—the *Apollo and Marsyas* of 1545 painted, together with a lost *Mercury and Argus*, for Pietro Aretino's house. But it is not, of course, necessary to assume that the *Sacra Conversazione* is, in fact, the earliest of his surviving paintings.

It is known that he had already done outdoor frescoes in Venice, which, like the majority of outdoor frescoes in the city, have disappeared. Almost our only knowledge of this once common Venetian practice is based on a battered fragment of one of Giorgione's frescoes from the façade of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi, now preserved in the Accademia, and Zanetti's not very impressive

engravings, done in the eighteenth century, of frescoes by Giorgione, Titian, Veronese and other Venetian painters, including a set of engravings after Tintoretto's frescoes on the Palazzo Soranzo.

But since Ridolfi describes Tintoretto as having assisted Schiavone in his early youth in painting furniture panels, it would be reasonable to expect to find such panels—especially those made for the decoration of cassoni—small in size and long in proportion to their height, done in a Schiavonesque manner, but showing signs of the impatient handwriting and spacious vision of the young Jacopo. Six of such panels do, in fact, exist in the Kunsthistorisches Museum at Vienna. They deal with Old Testament subjects—*Belshazzar's Feast*, the *Queen of Sheba before Solomon*, the *Removal of the Ark of the Covenant*, *Bathsheba before David*, the *Promise to David* and the *Death of Samson*. Von Hadeln's suggestion that these are among the earliest known Tintoretto's has been generally accepted. They have exactly that mixture of clumsiness and power that one would expect from a young man temperamentally fitted to work on a large scale, but forced by his unofficial apprenticeship to a furniture decorator to adapt his style to a small one. All of them show, in embryo form, the two characteristics by which one recognizes the finest work of his later period—power to suggest vast space, both laterally and in depth, with a continuous flow of interest and movement from foreground to background: and the kind of dramatic imagination (always foreign to Schiavone's temperament) that could project itself into the heart of a narrative and fill it with unexpected but completely convincing incidents. One feels here the uneasy, immature ambition of a youth already determined to outstrip his contemporaries, and failing only because he was not small enough to execute a minor commission with the taste and elegance it demanded. The effect is rather like a giant cracking a nut with a battle-axe. There are in these panels—each twelve inches high and five feet in length—so many hints of schemes worked out in greater detail and with fuller conviction in later paintings that it is impossible not to feel sure of their authorship and to suspect that they were done in the early forties, or the late thirties.

The next authentic painting, the *Last Supper* of San Marcuola, is dated 1547. Tietze's suggestions that the *Woman Taken in Adultery* in Dresden could have been painted earlier than this seems to me



manifestly impossible both on stylistic grounds and on the evidence of hairdressing and costume. Even more impossible is his dating of the altarpiece of *St. Ursula and the Virgins* in the church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti, which surely belongs to his maturity.

It is not the purpose of this chapter, or indeed of this book, to discuss all of Tintoretto's known works. My purpose is to concentrate on landmarks and, as far as possible, to omit nothing that added to Tintoretto's stature during the course of his career.

In 1547 two such landmarks appeared. In this year he painted two pictures for the church of San Marcuola. One, the *Last Supper* (Pl. 2), is dated and is still in the church. The other, *Christ Washing the Feet of St. Peter*, was, according to Ridolfi, sold, and replaced by a copy. It is now in the Escorial. Another copy, almost indistinguishable from the original in composition, is in Newcastle Cathedral.

The two pictures, painted to hang opposite to each other in the church, are so different in conception that only a restless, experimental artist like Tintoretto could have thought of them as being in any way complementary to each other. Here is the first indication of Tintoretto's divided allegiance between the traditional arrangement of figures *across* the surface of the canvas and their disposition in depth. In the *Last Supper* Tintoretto pays homage to many earlier paintings of the theme in which the table is stretched across the canvas and the compositional problem to be solved is one of the lateral grouping of the thirteen figures. True, Tintoretto takes fuller advantage than his predecessors of the depth of the table, and the seats are arranged all round it. But despite the deeper recession, and despite the two disciples who turn their backs the effect is still of a *row* of figures. The picture is animated rather than solemn, yet its rough symmetry, which is reinforced by the two symbolic figures entering from the sides, gives it a steadiness that partly compensates for its lack of solemnity.

Its companion picture is Tintoretto's first full-scale attempt to organize space in depth so completely that symmetry is no longer necessary or even possible. There is no need to describe it in detail. It is a wonderful advance on the cassone panel of *Belshazzar's Feast* at Vienna, from which it seems to derive, but Tintoretto was to tackle the same kind of theme—the skilful disposal of incidents so as to lead the eye without a break into the depths of the picture

—more successfully in later life. As compared with the *Last Supper* the gestures of the individual figures are more energetic. They use the space at their disposal with the utmost freedom. But there is still a slight awkwardness. They have a scattered look. And the main incident—the picture's subject—in the right foreground, balanced by the disciple who removes his sandals in the left foreground, is not quite absorbed into the organization of the whole. It is a relic of the earlier system that required the principal actors to be as near as possible to the footlights. Giorgione forty years earlier had made the experiment, in the *Fête Champêtre* and the *Tempestà*, of pushing his foreground figures to the side in order to create a vista between them, but here the vista is so far out of centre that one hardly feels that the foreground figures are acting as a frame for it.

A letter from Aretino fixes the date (1548) of the completion of the *Miracle of the Slave*. His comments are not very intelligent. Tintoretto is praised in warm but conventional terms for his realism. 'The whole spectacle seems real rather than painted,' and a patronizing note can be heard. 'Blessings be upon your name if you can moderate speed with patience in execution.' The picture was ordered by the Scuola of San Marco for which Jacopo was to paint, fifteen years later, three more pictures in a very different vein. Enough has already been said about the picture (see pp. 43 ff.) to establish its place in Tintoretto's long career. No other artist could have painted it, yet it is not typical. It was a triumph that could never be repeated. One marvels at it almost too much, as one would marvel at an athlete who, in the second lap of a long race, suddenly outstripped his competitors and established himself in lonely isolation far ahead of them: and yet, in making his spectacular effort was compelled to abandon some of the easy swing of his stride. The painting is one of the major landmarks in the history of European art, yet, paradoxically, Tintoretto's reputation would hardly suffer had it never been painted. One almost suspects him of trying to prove that, at the age of thirty, he could do the impossible before settling down to explore the virgin country that lay ahead of him.

The altarpiece for his parish church of S. Marziale (still in the church) was finished in December 1549. It is recorded that he was

working on it in March of the previous year, and received a payment of twenty ducats on account; so that it must have been started, at latest, immediately after the completion of the *Miracle of the Slave*. I find this painting of *S. Marcelliano with St. Peter and St. Paul* difficult to admire. The subject of a saint in ecstasy should, surely, have been congenial to him, but the altarpiece has a wooden air and looks like the work of a tired hand, as though the St. Mark picture had temporarily drained away his imaginative power.

But the pause was momentary. The years 1549-53 were both crowded and critical. The first of the series of pictures for the church of San Rocco—*San Rocco Visiting the Plague Stricken*—can now be dated 1549 (see pp. 142 ff.). The five narratives illustrating the book of Genesis, commissioned by the Scuola della Trinità, were completed between 1550 and 1553; the two votive pictures, the one of St. Andrew and the other of SS. Louis and George and the Princess, belong to 1552. They can be dated by the year in which the four magistrates who commissioned them held office.

Finally, on the 20th of December, 1553, the Council of Ten ordered the Magistrato del Sale to pay 100 of the 150 ducats fixed as a price for a painting in the Sala del Gran Consiglio in the Ducal Palace. This, evidently a work of considerable importance, perished in the fire of 1577. That Tintoretto should have been entrusted with a big commission in the most important room in the palace proves that his reputation was by this time secure, and his capacity for working on a large scale understood and recognized.

It has been pointed out already (see p. 47) that the five pictures for the Scuola della Trinità are the first fully expressive examples of the Tintoretto who was to lay the foundations of baroque painting, while the two votive pictures in the Accademia are among the last and the most satisfying of his heroic, classic style. Even the physical types depicted are different. In the St. George picture the magnificent amazonian figure of the Princess astride her dragon is essentially a creature of the High Renaissance. She is a sister to the equally noble woman whose back view is so memorable on the left of the crowd in the *Miracle of the Slave*. Both, one feels, are engaged in a rather self-conscious attitudinizing. The same splendid creature appears in the back view of the woman holding a child in the *Presentation of the Virgin* (1552-1556). As



the influence of Michelangelo weakens, these nobly poised creatures appear with less frequency in Tintoretto's painting.

The Scuola della Trinità series is now, alas, scattered. Three, the *Creation of Animals*, the *Temptation of Adam* and the *Death of Abel* are in the Accademia. The *Forbidden Apple* is in the Uffizi in Florence. The fifth, the *Creation of Eve*, is lost. Together, their cumulative effect must have been astonishingly unfamiliar. Here there is no attitudinizing. Eve is no Michelangelesque amazon. Ridolfi says the figures were drawn from life, but that does not explain their naturalness and the sense they give of being engaged in a drama that imposes on them its own gestures, even its own system of composition. Michelangelo, too, drew from life. Yet he, even when posing the model, must have been searching for a rhythmic attitude. Tintoretto surely asked his Adam and Eve to re-enact, quite simply, the proffering of the apple. In the *Creation of Animals* the Almighty trots unimpressively along the shore, like an earnest workman in a hurry to complete an important work. Only Cain and Abel have the unreal air of a group of wrestlers derived from a golden age Greek carving. And they, we know, owe a good deal to Titian's picture of the same theme in Santa Maria della Salute painted in 1543, just at that awkward moment in his career when he seemed to be hovering, uncertainly, on the brink of mannerism.

Nothing could be less mannerist than the *Temptation of Adam*. It is Tintoretto's earliest convincing essay on the theme of the naked figure, and one may well pause at this point to consider his very personal attitude to the human figure.

Of all the discoveries of Renaissance Italy, the discovery of the human body was the most revolutionary. It was far more than an acknowledgment to the Hellenic attitude, in so far as it was known to the Renaissance Italians through the medium of Greek and Graeco-Roman sculpture. What the Greeks had thought of as merely beautiful the Italians regarded, from the very beginning of the fifteenth century, as expressive. So that, whereas the Greek statue is *being*, the painted Renaissance figure is essentially *doing*. The gesture of that famous back view of the young man in Masaccio's *Tribute Money* in the Brancacci Chapel, is the gesture of a man in dramatic relationship with other men, despite the superficial resemblance to so many Graeco-Roman statues. I take him



as an example rather than the naked figures of Adam and Eve in the same chapel, because one is conscious of his physical being even more than of theirs. Clothing, in this case, though necessary to his narrative, was a hindrance to Masaccio's purpose. And as the Renaissance unfolded and as the introduction of pagan themes began to give painters fuller opportunities, the naked human body retained and developed its dramatic expressiveness. Masculine vigour, the central Florentine theme, reached its climax with Michelangelo. Feminine tenderness, followed by feminine opulence, made its appearance in Venice a little later. But it was inevitable that the Venetian ideal of femininity, which had been steadily developing through Giovanni Bellini's long series of Madonnas enthroned or engaged in 'Sacred Conversations,' should eventually need to be seen in the nude in order to have its full impact. Those two astonishing pictures of Giovanni's extreme old age, the *Feast of the Gods* and the *Girl at her Toilet*, are somewhat belated acts of homage to the feminine ideal. But, again, it was the human body in action that was their theme. Bellini's girl is not arranging her hair as an excuse for an effective pose. She is unconscious of the spectator. Michelangelo's athletes are by no means so unconscious, but they belong to a later stage in Renaissance development although they were painted a little before Bellini's Venetian girls.

It was not long before those girls were revealed as the first specimens of a long line of Venetian women who became increasingly adult and increasingly opulent as time went on, all combining the seductiveness of the Venetian feminine ideal with the aloofness of the Olympians. Giorgione's women are half-way to the fully developed type of Titian and Palma. But as Venetian art develops they become more conscious of their beauty. The nudes in Giorgione's *Fête Champêtre* are riper, physically, than Bellini's but they are still completely absorbed in their own life of action. The figure of Profane Love in Titian's picture in the Borghese Gallery is half occupied in attracting the attention of her partner and half engaged in appealing to the spectator. The *Venus of Urbino* of twenty-two years later frankly asks for our admiration. The series of recumbent Venuses with the Organ Player and the Lute Player, painted in the fifties, have no other thought but to display their beauty and bask in the spectator's appreciation of it.

It was at this very moment in Titian's development that Tintoretto was painting his Scuola della Trinità pictures. The contrast is remarkable. Tintoretto has recaptured all the innocent freshness of Bellini's *Feast of the Gods*, and all the unselfconsciousness of his *Girl at her Toilet*. Yet his Adam and Eve belong to the same fully developed adult race as Titian's. The splendid eroticism of Titian has disappeared because the sense of the intruding spectator has no part in Tintoretto's conception of the scene. Adam and Eve are neither Venetian citizens nor Olympians. They are healthy, athletic, golden-age mortals at a crisis in their simple lives; their bodies are part of the landscape, as inured to sun and wind as the trees and hills among which they live. The sense that a naked body is more vulnerable or more beautiful or more significant than a clothed one almost disappears in Tintoretto's case, and in his case only. No other artist has achieved this without either denying the body its full amplitude, as Botticelli did, or dehumanizing it as El Greco did. Of the great men who have painted the human body with passion, Tintoretto alone has avoided that slight emotional overemphasis that makes it detach itself from its surroundings. Perhaps Michelangelo solved the problem by refusing to admit that it had any surroundings. Rubens gives it a special density and texture, Renoir a special softness and radiance; no one but Tintoretto has taken it, emotionally, in his stride without diminishing its importance. That is what makes his four Pagan Allegories of the Anticollegio, painted when he was at the height of his powers, among the most memorable pictures of nudity in the world. And that is what makes his *Temptation of St. Anthony* in the church of San Trovaso in Venice, painted at the same period, relatively ineffective. He is incapable of the subtle shift of emphasis that can turn physical beauty into eroticism.

Though Tintoretto's pattern of stylistic development is more erratic than that of most artists, he certainly tended to go on exploring the possibilities of a painterly mood once he had discovered it. In the Scuola della Trinità series he had broken new ground. That welding of landscape and figures into a single dramatic unity of which the *Temptation of Adam* is the first example, is the theme of a group of pictures painted during the early fifties. A *Narcissus* in the Colonna Gallery in Rome has all the appearance of belonging to this period. The landscape has the same com-

plexity, the slender leaning trunks of the trees break the line of distant hills, the little valley winds away, the light falls in broken patches on the trunks and among the foliage, the whole conception is similar; but the *Narcissus* landscape is carried further, the rock formation by the stream is more explicit, the foliage has a finer texture.

The most magical of the pictures painted in this mood is the unforgettable *Susanna* in the Vienna Gallery (Pl. 6)—one of those inspirations that seems to derive from some accidental experience.<sup>1</sup> The pose of *Susanna* herself, though art historians have tried to connect it with a Graeco-Roman statue, and have noted the similarity of pose in the seated woman in Tintoretto's *Rescue of Arsinoe* in Dresden, has almost the air of a snapshot, as though Jacopo had chanced to walk into the room while Faustina was drying herself after the bath. It belongs to the same family of gestures that the aged Degas set himself to study when he made his long series of pastels of a model at her toilet. No other figure in Tintoretto's work has quite this momentary quality. Even more inspired is the use he made of it. As a composition it is extraordinary. The pool in the foreground, cut off by the lower edge of the frame, the long perspective of the rose hedge leading to another pool and a pergola seen through the same slender, waving trees that occur in the *Narcissus*, the two old men stalking the girl from either end of the hedge, the elaborate trellised screen, the glimpse of a deer on the left, the affectionate care with which the comb and pin and pearl necklace and ointment pot and the discarded clothing have been painted, combine to make a picture of unusual intensity. It is the kind of arrangement one would expect to find by chance in the wings of an elaborately set scene in the theatre. Even the lighting is exceptional. Tintoretto's normal habit is to direct his lighting hither and thither so that it lies impartially across figures and their environment, fusing the two together. But here *Susanna* and her personal possessions seem to live in a phosphorescent light of their own. The light and shadow that dapple her body are subordinate to her inner glow. This is an arrested moment from a fairy tale in a haunted garden. It is a mood that occurs again in painting in some of Rossetti's romantic attempts to peer into the medieval world. Nothing could be odder than this combination of a *femme*

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 223.



*au tub* by Degas with a bowery stage setting by a pre-Raphaelite. Yet nothing could be more memorable. It would be fanciful to suggest that Tintoretto wanted to detach Susanna from her surroundings in order to give her the kind of significance that she must have had in the eyes of the elders, the separate existence of a ripe peach on a bough in the eyes of a greedy schoolboy. That is not the way in which Tintoretto's conscious mind usually worked. Yet there must be occasions, while an artist's creative genius is operating at high pressure, in which his unconscious mind takes charge and transcends his normal processes of thought. In its colour, too, the *Susanna* is unforgettable. It is a *green* picture, rich and deep, like the heart of a beech forest in high summer, but broken by three splashes of warm colour—the three related figures. The peachlike radiance of Susanna is balanced by the bright orange and white beard of the crouching old man in the foreground. In the centre, the pale wine colour of the distant elder links the two vivid patches and completes the triangle.

This strangeness, as of an infinitely desirable fruit, is perhaps Tintoretto's substitute for the noble eroticism of Titian. He never achieved it again. And if I am right in thinking that it was painted soon after 1550, it is significant that Jacopo had just married Faustina. This is surely how a man sees his bride. A *Leda* in the Contini Collection, painted in the same spirit, probably belongs to the same date, but the figure has none of this effect of a sudden revelation. It is a conventional exploitation of the baroque diagonal, with a conventionally draped curtain added as though to convert an unusually elegant study of a single figure into a pictorial design. Another, and a far nobler painting in the same mood, almost certainly painted before the *Susanna*<sup>1</sup> is the Munich *Venus and Vulcan* (Pl. 7). Tintoretto is still practising variations on the slant across the picture combined with a slant into the picture of which the first firmly dated instance is seen in the *Temptation of Adam*. Here the design is more closely knit, the lighting scheme more subtle, and the marvellous colour—dark mushroom purples, dull gold, pearl-greys and flesh colour—binds the picture together, despite the scattered limbs and the diversity of objects it contains, into a steady, almost a calm unity. It is the grandest, so far, of Tintoretto's explorations into the limited space of a domestic interior. It is

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 220.



even part of its surprising power that these splendid, agitated nudes should be contained in a setting so reminiscent of a respectable little Dutch master of a century later.

As though he had temporarily exhausted the possibilities of pastoral or mythological themes, Tintoretto's next group of pictures has a more formal air. They tackle, in various moods, the problem of the set altarpiece, the composition that depends for its full effect on an architectural context. The two votive pictures, the *St. Andrew and St. Jerome* and the *St. George and his Princess with St. Louis* already mentioned, are the earliest of them. They can be dated with certainty by the term of office of the magistrates for whom they were painted. Andrea Dandolo and Girolamo Bernardo who commissioned the former, both completed their terms of office in 1552, Giorgio Venier and Alvise (the Venetian form of Ludovico) Foscari in September 1551 and May 1553. A sidelight on the attitude of the Titian-Aretino circle at this period can be found in Dolce's *Dialogo della Pittura*, where, without mentioning Tintoretto's name, Dolce puts into the mouth of Aretino a scornful reference to the bad taste of an artist who could make St. Margaret (Dolce mistakes St. George's Princess for the Saint) sit astride a serpent.

Two restless and overcrowded altarpieces, an *Assumption* now in the Cathedral of Torcello, and a *Madonna in Glory* in the Modena Gallery, seem to belong to the same group. They are unattractive, immensely ambitious paintings, exercises in mannerist composition of a kind that one would expect to find lesser men than Tintoretto producing a generation later, yet the Torcello picture, for all the clumsiness and heaviness of the draperies, contains passages that could only have been painted by Tintoretto, and the ample beards of the apostles are typical of the fifties. The Modena altarpiece is even more disturbing. The Saints and putti that surround the Virgin seem to have nothing to do with Tintoretto, yet the back view of St. John the Baptist is closely related to a drawing in the Uffizi (No. 1834) which is here reversed and appears again, not reversed, in the *Worship of the Golden Calf* in the Madonna del' Orto; and the figure of the Virgin (again reversed) is very close to a drawing in a private collection in Florence.

What makes the two altarpieces worth considering seriously as early works by Tintoretto is their composition. They are the

earliest examples of a system of design that Tintoretto was to make his own twenty years later. One could call it the system of the whirlpool, in which all the main elements seem to be held in tension round the circumference of an implied circle, as though thrust outwards by centrifugal force. The heads of the apostles in the Assumption form a circle in depth, looking inwards to the centre of the whirlpool. The spiral movement of the Madonna seems to set the whole picture spinning. A similar circle revolving round empty space occurs in the lower half of the *Madonna in Glory*. Its authenticity has been accepted by most historians but the feebleness of the upper saints and the unconvincing putti above look to me like major alterations by a later hand.<sup>1</sup>

Another datable but not very interesting formal painting of the period is the votive picture in the Accademia (commissioned by Girolamo Cigogna, Andrea Renier and Alvise Foscari in 1555) of the three saints whose names they bear. Signs of boredom and impatience are evident in this rather stiff composition.

The *Crucifixion* in the Accademia (Pl. 4) can only be dated by guesswork and such hints as can be gathered from styles of hair-dressing and costume. A preparatory drawing of the two soldiers throwing dice in the right-hand corner, in the Uffizi (No. 13005), has none of the nervous strength and sense of powerful movement of later drawings. The painting could have been done at any time between 1555 and 1560; it would be helpful to know the exact date but pedantic to feel unhappy at not knowing. It is another landmark in Tintoretto's progress, and if he had never painted the great *Crucifixion* in the Scuola of San Rocco (Pl. 26), it would be one of the greatest interpretations of the subject in the world. As it is, one can hardly help thinking of it as a kind of dress rehearsal for the San Rocco canvas which he finished, signed and dated in 1565. The two pictures have the same symmetry (which Tintoretto only used either when he was working on a vast scale or when he wanted a particularly solemn hieratic mood) the same frontal view, the same dramatic lighting, the horses and riders on either side, the animated crowds, the group of women huddled round the swooning Virgin at the foot of the cross. In one respect it is even more impressive than the San Rocco *Crucifixion*. It depicts a moment of greater finality. There is movement in it but it con-

<sup>1</sup> A recent cleaning of the picture confirms this guess.

tains no sense of bustle and preparation. The giant soldier in black armour on the left is striding away from the scene, the man on the white horse on the right guides his horse away from the cross. The words 'Consummatum est' have been spoken. The crisis is over, whereas at San Rocco it is at its height. One's first impression of it is, perhaps, of slight shock at finding its colour so full and rich. It is as though it were Tintoretto's last attempt to cling to the grand heraldic colour schemes of earlier Venetian art. Great areas and patches of local colour, intense, saturated blues, glowing reds play across the picture's surface. Tintoretto's rapidly developing command of light and shade struggles in vain to destroy its purely decorative quality. From the half-tone reproduction one would never guess at this heraldic splendour. In front of the picture itself colour and chiaroscuro mysteriously combine, without interfering with each other. In that respect I can think of no parallel to this painting.

It is here, for the first time, that Tintoretto shows his fully developed sense of rhythmic grouping. A strange light picks out and unites the crowds of women gathered on the hillside. Nearer still, towards the centre, an area of shadow links together horses and figures, and against this dark mass the dramatic incidents of the foreground are set—the stricken women at the foot of the cross in the centre, framed in by the standing figures of Joseph of Arimathea and the soldier who holds the ladder, the three dice-throwers on the right, the unconcerned women and the striding soldier on the left. Yet despite all this movement, the central figure on the cross above, marvellously illuminated, strangely quiet, gazing down not in anguish but in pity, dominates the whole.

Tintoretto learned this art of grouping—of interrelating his figures, however widely spaced or densely packed they might be—from none of his contemporaries. Is it fanciful to imagine that it was suggested to him by the late Byzantine mosaics in St. Mark's with which every Venetian was familiar but which seem to have influenced the Venetian High Renaissance hardly at all? One can easily imagine the young Tintoretto, alert and sensitive as he was to his surroundings, finding in these mosaics a stimulus from which his predecessors had been immune. There is a group of sleeping disciples in the twelfth-century mosaic of the Agony in the Garden (see Pls. 11 and 12) which seems to me to hold the secret of Tinto-



retto's system of massing his figures. It has exactly the same closely knit texture, the same interweaving of forms. And if, at first sight, this connection between late Byzantine and early Baroque art seems impossible, since the Byzantine mosaic is based on an arabesque of line while Tintoretto's system depended on the massing of tones, a closer inspection of Tintoretto's work from about 1555 onwards shows that he too was evolving a system of linear arabesque *within* the framework of his big masses.

This system is not as apparent in this *Crucifixion* as it was to become later, but its beginnings can be seen. It depends, quite simply, on designing the whole picture in large and well-defined areas of light and dark, and then of explaining their structure by *drawing* with the brush, in light lines on the dark areas and in dark lines on the light areas. This alternation between mass and line—the carefully designed mass and the nervous, intuitive line—is almost the keynote of Tintoretto's later style. It is a dangerous system, only possible to a man with a profound knowledge of the sculptural meaning of the forms he describes.

Veronese used it tentatively because he found it an attractive way of modifying his colour, and he used it to produce a decorative patterning across his surfaces. Tintoretto used it for a more serious purpose. He was able, by its means, to *explain* the form, to turn a flat area of paint into a complexity of interlocking planes, and at the same time to create that sense of vital movement that is never absent from his best work. It is as though he were carving by means of broken flashes of lightning.

I think it was in the crowded figures in the background of the *Crucifixion* in the Venetian Accademia (Pl. 4) that I first noticed how similar was this system of linear exploration of form to that in Henry Moore's drawings for sculpture. The similarity was startling, and it shed a good deal of light on the quality of vision of both artists. In both cases, the perception of the solidity and the structure of objects is not a question of seeing the play of light across their surfaces but of feeling one's way round the structure, realizing the shape of the section through them at every point in their surface. The sculptor has in this respect an advantage over the painter—or, to be precise, over the Renaissance painter—in that he can afford to think only in terms of formal structure and to ignore the play of light which his statue will provide for him



automatically. Tintoretto, though his eye was so alert to structure, was compelled by the whole of sixteenth-century tradition to base the plan of his pictures on the impact of light. To reconcile these contradictory methods of vision was one of his major problems and he had to devise a technical process of his own for its solution.

Tintoretto's preparatory drawings of figures, so different from those of any other Venetian artist, take on a new meaning as soon as one realizes how his eye worked. They are almost always drawings of movement. Rarely are they shaded, in the conventional sense of the word. For an artist so conscious of the play of light it seems extraordinary that areas of shadow and even the direction of light should hardly be indicated in his charcoal studies. Yet the impression of solidity and of weight is never absent from them. They are mainly linear maps, done at breakneck speed with a multiplicity of broken, curved lines each of which has a double function. It explains the muscular construction of the body but it also explains its cross-section. The lines, as often as not (see Pls. 72, 73, 74) travel at right angles to the containing contour. And the containing contour itself surges and ripples as though it were denying its function of describing an *edge*. It carries the eye round the solid cylinder of a thigh or a torso, ignoring it as a shape, insisting on it as a volume.

I still find it difficult to imagine by what process these essentially structural drawings were translated into the chiaroscuro of the paintings. For example, in this *Crucifixion* of the Venetian Accademia, the play of light on the crucified Christ is quite independent of the structure. The lower legs are in deep shadow, so is the head, which casts a shadow across the arm as far as the elbow: the rest of the body is brightly illuminated. Yet the bulk of Tintoretto's preparatory drawings contain no indication of this play of light. Was this all-important element in the picture worked out imaginatively in Tintoretto's mind? Did he prepare another series of chiaroscuro sketches, most of which have been lost, to reinforce the structural ones? Or did he work direct on his canvas from small illuminated models? An essential step seems to be missing, and though nothing is impossible to genius, the designing of the main masses of light and shadow in a picture of such complexity must have involved an immense amount of imaginative planning, and

one would have expected to find, at least, a few rough notes of so important a process among the surviving drawings.

One such drawing does, in fact, exist—the sketch for the picture of *Venus and Vulcan* (Pl. 8). It is an elaborate chiaroscuro drawing of the kind referred to on p. 18 that must have been prepared—and, indeed, that Marco Boschini expressly says that Tintoretto did prepare (*Ricche Minere*, Venice, 1674) for every one of his major pictures.<sup>1</sup> It is evidently a study from one of his “piccole case,” done in pen and wash heightened with white on blue paper and it is exactly what one would have expected. The main structure of the room is clearly indicated, the two figures of Vulcan and Venus firmly sketched in, but the accessories—the dog, the sleeping Cupid, the draperies, the lurking figure of Mars—are not there, as they certainly would have been if this had been a rapid sketch of the finished picture. The chief alteration is the reflection in the circular mirror of the back of Vulcan, evidently *imagined* quite wrongly in the sketch and corrected by observation in a full-scale mirror when the design came to be worked out on canvas.

What is extraordinary is that such drawings are so rare. There is a series of somewhat similar drawings, once thought to be by Jacopo but now usually ascribed to Domenico, in the British Museum, but they have none of the firmness and confidence of this and, in any case, none of them can be connected with specific pictures by Jacopo. They have rather the air of exercises in composition than of preparations for pictures. A full discussion of them, of their origin, and their authorship is to be found in Tietze's *Drawings of the Venetian Painters*, p. 263.

Many of the numerous drawings for single figures which survive are stained with oil and spotted with paint, as though they had been held in the hand or left lying about the studio during early stages in the painting. And it is not unlikely that the chiaroscuro sketches of the whole composition, which must have been used at an even earlier stage, may have become too dirty and stained to be worth keeping. But the fortunate preservation of this *Venus and Vulcan* drawing (which is not squared for enlargement and therefore may have been replaced by another for use in roughing

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Giles Robertson points out to me that Boschini's phrase ‘abbozzava il quadro tutto di chiaro oscuro’ may mean that he sketched out the light and shade on the actual canvas.

out the design on the canvas) enables us to see how Tintoretto was developing his system of massing his light and dark areas. If the drawing and the painting are compared one sees at once how Tintoretto, without altering the main lighting effect of the drawing, has simplified it. Vulcan's right leg, which catches flashes of light on the thigh and calf in the drawing, becomes a dark silhouette in the picture. The violent shadows that cut the body of Venus in two in the drawing are toned down. The shadow of the bed that lies across the floor in the sketch is not allowed to interfere with the dark purple and grey pattern of the tiled floor in the painting.

In this short account I have mentioned rather more than half of the completed surviving canvases of the first decade of Tintoretto's active life as a painter. To these must be added at least a dozen known portraits, a not inconsiderable amount of work in the Ducal Palace, including, besides the picture for the Hall of the Grand Council mentioned above, a *Pietà* behind the throne in the Hall of the Senate (all of which perished in the fire of 1577) pictures of minor importance for the Procuratie buildings in Venice, and smaller altarpieces like the delightful *Birth of St. John the Baptist* now, at last, visible in a good light in the Sacristy of the church of San Zaccaria. It was, perhaps, not a more crowded decade than any other in a life conducted at a steady high pressure for nearly fifty years. But it was the decade which contains all his major experiments and which establishes the full range of his painterly moods. Almost everything done after 1555 is a further exploration of something begun before that year.

In the field of picture-planning Tintoretto had worked out most of the possibilities of the disposition, the grouping and the lighting of figures in space. He had established a new kind of connection between figures and landscape, he had laid the foundations of baroque design which remained valid for the next two centuries, he had carried the Venetian principles of formal altarpiece design to their final conclusion, and in doing so had rendered them practically obsolete. He had proved himself a master of every mood from blithe pastoral idyll to profound Christian narrative. There were certain notes of deep tragedy which he had not yet attempted and which he was not to attempt until he came to paint in the Scuola of San Rocco, and there was a certain turbulent

energy which he was not fully to achieve until he essayed the gigantic *Last Judgment* in the Madonna dell' Orto. But apart from these two moods, the first of which could only be dared by a man of full maturity, the second, by a very considerable weight of experience and then only on an exceptionally large scale, the Tintoretto of 1555 was already the Tintoretto we have in mind when we think of his work as a whole. In some respects he had already achieved full stature. The *Susanna* of Vienna is one of the paintings that the world could least easily dispense with. But—with the exception of it and the *Miracle of the Slave*—there is no picture, or rather, no *kind* of picture painted before 1555 that he did not paint with equal or greater power in his later years.

Unlike Titian, who outgrew his youth, and was never able in his later years to repeat the exquisite springlike Giorgionesque lyricism of *Sacred and Profane Love*, or the healthy athletic paganism of *Bacchus and Ariadne*, Tintoretto *did* repeat himself. He never left his youth behind. He had no period of enchanting adolescence. Instead he became adult in his early thirties, and, during the rest of his life continually broadened and deepened his own powers, but never felt the need to change their direction.

Marco Boschini's brief but illuminating description of Tintoretto's methods in 1674 of working has been quoted above (see p. 35). What he wrote of the painter's strange temperament, knowing the whole of his work, could already have been said with equal truth at this first stage in his career. Boschini, even though he was writing at the height of the Baroque era, finds it necessary to use violent metaphors, comparing Tintoretto to lightning and thunder. His arrows, says Boschini, struck the highest summit of painting. His brush frightened the most generous champions of art. His figures leap out of the canvas. One's eye is dazed by the vigour of his movement. He could imitate the style of other artists but was himself inimitable. Only his son Domenico could approach the electric discharge (*fulminante pennello*) of his brush stroke.

To the student of to-day, all this hardly needs saying. But one senses that Boschini's enthusiasm strikes a slightly defensive note. Even in the middle of the seventeenth century Tintoretto's daring innovations needed explaining, and to Boschini must be given the credit for having been the first to understand the real quality of his dynamic genius.



## *Chapter Seven*

1556—JUNE 1564

ANY attempt to decide on a chronology for the paintings of the second decade of Tintoretto's activity is doomed, in the absence of further evidence, to failure. Out of a total of more than thirty important works the dates of not more than four are known; others, because of the lapse of time between the recorded date of the commission and the document establishing final payment, are puzzling, and all one can gather from the discrepancies is that Tintoretto was by this time so much in demand, or so eager to secure commissions that he was quite unable, despite the speed at which he worked, to cope with the amount of work he had to do. As for the rest, one can only make conjectures; and, since historians have found it almost impossible to resist the temptation to do so, the result is a disheartening confusion of opinions based on nothing more solid than vague and often imaginary similarities between one painting and another.

I propose not to add to this confusion except in cases where my own conviction is unusually strong, or where internal evidence seems to have escaped the notice of previous writers. There is, for example, a series of frieze-like panels in the Prado which Coletti ('after much hesitation, but with firm conviction') considers to belong to 1555, and Tietze says 'could hardly have been painted before the end of the 1550's' and dates 'about 1560.' They are small decorative panels evidently designed as a frieze for a small room. There is nothing quite like them in the rest of Tintoretto's work. Evidently he has been anxious, for once, to achieve some of Veronese's emphasis on glitter and luxury. One is conscious of rich brocades and jewellery; architectural backgrounds and trees participate in this decorative pageantry. Even if the looped corsages, slit dresses and square hairdressing with its abundance of small curls did not manifestly belong to the eighties, this group of

paintings refuses, psychologically, to fit into this intensely serious decade in Jacopo's life.<sup>1</sup> It is a period of grave and noble pictures, broken only by experiments in an unusually melodramatic or a daringly turbulent vein. Only two of the paintings that could reasonably be ascribed to this period belong to the lyrically poetic tradition in which he conceived his earlier *Leda*, *Venus and Vulcan* and *Susanna*. One is the *St. George and the Dragon* in the National Gallery (Pl. 49), another, the curious *Rescue of Arsinoe* at Dresden, in which the seated figure in the boat is in exactly the same pose as *Susanna* but seen as a three-quarter back view. One is naturally inclined, on this slender piece of evidence, to connect the two pictures chronologically, but since I have not examined the Dresden picture, the temptation to rely on the evidence of a reproduction must be resisted.

The National Gallery *St. George* is like no other painting by Tintoretto. The wild, disconnected movements of the Saint galloping away to the left, the Princess rushing forward to the right, the motionless corpse between them, uniting yet separating the two protagonists; the frowning battlements, the mysterious Altdorfer-like forest, the bright vision breaking through the overhanging clouds—all this reminds one of some restless Nordic masterpiece. Indeed it is almost impossible to believe that there is no connection between the burst of light in the sky and that in Altdorfer's *Battle of Alexander*, in Munich. Yet, in effect, nothing could be more Venetian. The Venetian genius for inventing noble gesture was never better displayed on a small scale, nor was Tintoretto's own genius for making that gesture energetic or emphatic without robbing it of any of its nobility. A North European painter would have twisted the Princess's expression into an agony of fear. The Venetian leaves her features serene and invents a pose that will express her terror. The glowing depth of colour, too, is typical of Venice rather than of Tintoretto. Here, certainly Tintoretto captured the 'colorito' though not quite the 'colore' of Titian. Titian himself never modulated the pink and crimson glazes on crumpled drapery more subtly than in the Princess's flying cloak. It is this combination of harsh Nordic romanticism with Venetian opulence that makes the picture so haunting.

But its queerest characteristic is its composition. Visualized in

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 228.

depth, with all its main features arranged one behind the other, as though disposed along a corridor, its lower half is planned in a series of arcs of concentric circles of which the centre is the knot with which the Princess has hurriedly tied the ends of her crimson cloak to assist her in her flight. The spread of the cloak, the curve of the prone corpse, the curve of the horse and dragon, the lie of the land itself are all based on this centre, as though the corridor down which we are invited to look were itself slowly revolving. And to counterbalance these arcs of circles below, the sky above breaks out into concentric ovals. Originally the painting had a semi-circular top which must have reinforced the curves of the lower portion—it may even have suggested them.

Though the picture is not typical, it is completely characteristic in that it shows Tintoretto's method of approach to his subject-matter. It is an approach which, I think, only Degas among later masters has achieved. The method, put in its simplest terms, is an imaginative effort to be on the spot at the most significant moment, to see the happening as though one were involved in it though not participating in it. In Degas's case, one has the sensation of seeing it, almost accidentally, through a keyhole. In Tintoretto's case, the result is equally unexpected though not quite so intimate. It is as though he were an invisible spectator who had chanced to come upon the scene from an unexpected angle.

Whenever any dramatic issue was involved, this became Tintoretto's invariable habit of mind. For portraits, single figures, and formal altarpieces, he could, of course, make no use of it; and that, surely, explains his comparative mediocrity when compelled to tackle such works. But from about 1555 onwards, and especially in the Scuola of San Rocco, where he felt completely unfettered in his imaginative process, this capacity to think of himself as an eyewitness of events rather than as a creator of narrative paintings provides the fundamental explanation both of his style and his composition.

Titian, however dramatic his subject may be, sees it as a producer sees his actors in rehearsal. He arranges his grouping and gestures, decides on his main masses, directs his lines of energy and repose as seems most effective to him, with the result that his characters are always a little aloof and selfconscious. They are acting their parts for our benefit.

Tintoretto's characters are doing no such thing. And since they move through space so much more freely, in response to their own promptings, than those of Titian, Tintoretto is always finding himself involved in new kinds of composition. There is no Tintorettesque formula, for when one is prepared to visualize any scene from any point of view, no formula is possible. He enters the room in which the Marriage at Cana is being celebrated at the far end, and finds himself looking down the whole length of the table (Pl. 16); he sees the Last Supper (Pls. 39, 69) from one corner and is committed to an unprecedented diagonal; he comes on the Nativity (Pl. 36) from below and has to gaze upwards at it, crouching among the shepherds; at the Presentation of the Virgin (Pl. 17) he pushes his way through the spectators and places himself at the bottom of the great flight of stairs. The girl Virgin is already half-way up, and his vision of her is almost blocked by a woman and her little daughter who are just beginning to ascend.

A hundred instances of this way of projecting himself into the picture could be given. The student of Tintoretto can easily note them for himself, but the point at issue is that each time Tintoretto launched himself into one of these imaginative adventures, he had to create a picture of a new shape, and explore a new set of compositional possibilities. Hence his extraordinary variety both of pattern and of mood.

I do not claim that he did not repeat himself, or that certain patterns and moods were not more congenial to him than others. For an artist so prolific and so personal it would be impossible to tackle each new problem with an unprejudiced mind. Tintoretto did develop mannerisms, even tricks, by which he can be instantly recognized, but they become insignificant when one remembers his capacity to think out with each new picture a new framework to contain them.

One of the few paintings of this period in which he is content to use the traditional symmetrical system of composition is the *Crucifixion* in the Church of the Gesuati, on the Zattere. But here, despite the limitations imposed on him by the requirements of a formal symmetrical altarpiece, Tintoretto introduces, at the foot of the cross, one of those clustered groups of figures that occur many times in his works. No fewer than seven figures gather round and support the swooning Virgin, each in a separately designed



attitude of tenderness and solicitude, yet with a single rhythm running through the whole closely-knit group. One of these groups had already occurred in the *Crucifixion* at the Accademia. There is another in the *Deposition* at Caen. Such a group fills the whole canvas in the *Entombment* in the Accademia. The most moving and tragic of them all occupies the centre foreground of the great *Crucifixion* of San Rocco. At the end of his life he returned again to the theme in the *Entombment* of San Giorgio Maggiore, in which two masses of linked figures, one gathered round the dead Jesus, and the other bending over the fainting Virgin, lean in opposing directions like mirrored echoes of each other.

As far as one can judge from internal evidence the Accademia *Entombment* is among the earliest of these groups,<sup>1</sup> and, since it fills the whole canvas, it is interesting to compare it with Titian's three versions of the same theme. Titian's *Entombment* in the Louvre, painted when Tintoretto was about seven years old, is the noblest of them all and is deservedly one of the best-loved Titians in the world. Of the two Madrid versions, one was probably painted a year or two later than Tintoretto's, the other six or seven years later still. The Louvre picture shows Titian as a master of what must be called pre-Tintoretto composition. The figures are disposed with magnificence across the canvas, but, though they have plenty of space to move in, in depth, they are quite unable to use it. Consequently the picture depends for its grandeur on its silhouette, the dome formed by the three bearers and the pale hammock curve of Christ's body contained within that dome. Tintoretto produced no silhouette. He is unwilling to design one for us since his main intention is to emphasize the movements into and out of the picture—the diagonal backward thrust of the dead body, the bowed torsos, the arms and heads that move towards and away from us. All this is further explained by the play of light. That little splash of light on the mouth of the Christ and that other on the forehead could only occur on a surface that was sloping backwards.

But in 1559 and 1565 when Titian painted his later versions, the Tintorettesque method was familiar to him, yet he had not grasped its full implications. The mystery of light as an aid to dramatic or tragic effect is certainly there, and space is used more freely.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 221.

The silhouette has disappeared. But the power to interrelate all the elements of the design, so that they seem bound together with complete inevitability, is denied to Titian. In concentrated poignancy he can outmatch Tintoretto. In the breadth of his grasp of an integrated whole he is left far behind.

It is only on rare occasions such as this, or the *St. George* in the National Gallery, when Tintoretto is painting what would now be called an 'easel picture' that he can be compared with Titian. And the fact that the occasions are rare, shows how far Tintoretto had already moved in the direction of Baroque design. For it is part of the Baroque system to sacrifice individual poignancies to breadth. As an easel picture, Tintoretto's *Entombment* is somehow a failure. In conception it is too big to be contained within a frame. The Virgin's head, for example, in which the sockets of the eyes are felt as a single dark shadow within which the eye itself is a rather tiresome detail, could never have been so conceived by Titian.

And it is noteworthy that only in these rare cases when Tintoretto forced himself to work on the smaller scale of the easel picture were his pictures exportable. With the exception of the four famous Anticollegio Allegories, almost all of Tintoretto's smaller and more lyrical pictures are to be found outside his native Venice. They were acquired by collectors not only because they were portable but also because they were comparatively Titianesque. It was not until Rubens found the formula for turning a Baroque design into a portable panel that Baroque painting became desirable from the princely collector's point of view.

In 1551 Tintoretto received the commission to paint the double organ doors, both inside and out, in the church of the Madonna dell' Orto. In the following year he undertook a similar commission for organ doors in Santa Maria Zobenigo. Neither commission was finished until five years later. In the latter, the *Conversion of St. Paul*, which formed the complete picture seen when the doors were closed, was mildly praised by Vasari, but it has since disappeared. The two inside panels, which framed the organ symmetrically when the doors were opened, are still in the church. They are gloomy impressive works, painted with masterly impatience. On the left the evangelists John and Mark, on the right Luke and Matthew, are seated on dark rolling clouds in

rather too rhetorical attitudes and in a rather too lurid light. One can surely assume that the commission for the Madonna dell' Orto—his own parish church—interested him more, and that these two panels were done without much enthusiasm, following what amounted to a mannerist formula, and with a view to their effectiveness at a considerable height from the eye and in a badly lit place in the church.

The organ doors for the Madonna dell' Orto, on the other hand, are among Jacopo's grandest conceptions. Like those of Santa Maria Zobenigo they are double doors. Closed, they formed a single panel *The Presentation of the Virgin*. Open, the panel on the left represents the *Vision of St. Peter*, that on the right *The Martyrdom of St. Christopher*, both of them as radiant as the Evangelists are gloomy. The *Presentation of the Virgin*, now removed and joined down the centre, hangs on the right of the church near the little Vescovi chapel where Jacopo is buried.

St. Peter adopts exactly the same Michelangesque gesture as the Princess astride the dragon (see p. 46) but with more reason, for he is watching over his shoulder the approach of four of Tintoretto's most convincing airborne angels bearing the cross of martyrdom. Three of them "trampling the slant winds on high" take part in a steady combined onrush. The fourth opposes them and forces the arms of the cross upwards. The centrifugal circle (see p. 84) so often implicit in Tintoretto's paintings, is actually shown, binding these diagonally poised creatures together, with the shaft of the cross cutting through it.

Here, too, is an example of Tintoretto's method of designing in strongly defined patches of light and dark (see p. 49) unrelated, or only loosely related to structure. The two right-hand angels are dark areas, so is the lower half of the centre angel and the cross itself. The upper head and shoulders of the centre angel and the whole of the upper angel except the right arm are pale. St. Peter himself is divided into similar areas that contribute to the angular rhythms of the design but bear no relation to the solid construction of his body.

The same system, on an even broader scale, dictates the composition of the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Pl. 17). I have already noted (see p. 49) that the original vertical division of the picture may have suggested a rough division into a dark left-hand side and a light

right-hand side. It is worth remarking that the rhythms in the dark half are mainly vertical, those in the right half horizontal. But this is not the kind of painting that can be described in the vocabulary of the analyst. It is certainly a 'planned' picture but its effect on the spectator is not that of a manufactured masterpiece. Its power is mysterious. There is no difficulty in placing the spectator at the foot of an immense flight of steps with a towering elongated figure at the top to overawe him. That is a piece of simple dramatic imagining that requires no titan genius to conceive. What makes it astonishing are the two imaginative leaps one is compelled to make in order to reach the High Priest, and the contrast between the three personages who define the beginning and the end of those leaps. The poised amazon, whose outstretched arm points out to her little girl that she too will climb those stairs, directs, at the same time, the spectator's eye to the lonely little figure of the Virgin. At that figure the eye must pause before it ascends still further to the waiting High Priest symbolically separated from her by the Pyramid. There is a queer tension between these three, and the ascending line of crouching figures in the shadow heightens the tension by their concentrated gaze.

Twenty years earlier Titian had painted the same subject. He had arranged it, characteristically, in breadth and not in depth, but his intention had been the same. The same woman with an outstretched arm at the foot of the steps, the same waiting priest at the top, the same timid girl, isolated between them. Yet the tension is not there. Titian can grasp the solemn ritual and the pageantry in the scene, but not its inner meaning. Vasari praised Tintoretto's picture when he saw it in 1566, but one suspects that what mainly impressed him was the Raphaelesque grandeur of the pointing woman and the convincing foreshortening of her arm.

It was on the same visit to Venice and in the same church that Vasari saw the newly completed *Last Judgment* (Pl. 18) and possibly the *Worship of the Golden Calf* (Pl. 19) which may not yet have been placed in position, and wrote of the former that 'you would think it had been painted as a joke.' They fill the whole space of the side walls of the choir from the top of the dado to the point of the arch fifty feet above. Their height is about two and a half times their width. They were by far the largest canvases he had yet undertaken and tradition has it that they were painted on the spot.



Certainly the separate pieces of canvas on which they are painted seem to have been amateurishly sewn together, though the same could be said of many of his larger pictures. Tintoretto seems to have been unusually careless about the seams of his canvases. But he had not yet moved into the large house on the Fondamenta dei Mori, and no ordinary studio would have been large enough to hold such vast stretches of canvas. It is possible that it was in order to simplify his own problem of organizing compositions on this scale that he virtually divided them both into two sections and introduced a horizontal construction line into each of them, the line of the top of the cataract in the *Last Judgment* and of the stretched awning in the *Golden Calf*, at a height of about fifteen feet from the base of each picture. The rough stitching of the canvases is most noticeable above this line, and it is possible that the more elaborately painted lower halves were completed in the studio while the rest was done in the church. In the case of the *Golden Calf* there is even a break in the general tonality between the upper and the lower half.

Ridolfi tells us that Tintoretto undertook to complete both paintings for a hundred ducats, exclusive of expenses, a price which, had he cared to make the calculation, worked out at something like thirty shillings per square yard.

Among the most famous of Ruskin's descriptive passages is that in Volume II of *Modern Painters* in which he describes the *Last Judgment* of the Madonna dell' Orto. Ruskin's rhetoric expresses, I think, exactly the feelings that Tintoretto himself hoped to arouse. Time has no more rendered those pages obsolete than it has dimmed the potency of what they so fervently describe. For that reason, no writer on Tintoretto dares, to-day, attempt his own description. Yet one understands Vasari's half-scornful phrase. In saying that one would think it had been painted as a joke, the Florentine was, surely, comparing it in his mind with the west wall of the Sistine Chapel. That, certainly, was *not* painted as a joke. Yet, however much it may have pleased Vasari, to us it has become a titanic failure. Perhaps the very theme of the *Last Judgment* was an impossible one for the High Renaissance. Perhaps only the hieratic dogmatism of Byzantine art can grapple with such a subject. The huge west wall of the Duomo of Torcello with its staring, bedizened archangels, its five rigid tiers, its merciless

systematization, its formal solemnity, is, to me, more impressive as an account of the finality of celestial judgment than either Michelangelo's or Tintoretto's conceptions. Yet if the Humanism of a later age, with its confident emphasis on the beauty of the human body, and its impotence to suggest the peril of the human soul, is to interpret a theme that concerns the human soul alone, then I would rather it were done by Tintoretto than by Michelangelo.

Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* is that of a ripe and rather heavy-hearted philosopher. Tintoretto's is the electrifying nightmare of a young man who cannot contemplate pain or punishment with equanimity. The apocalyptic awe of the Byzantines has returned in another form—apocalyptic terror. The Christ who sits on high, almost out of sight, under the apex of the Gothic arch, a lily on one side and a sword on the other, is not engaged in a calm dispensation of justice. One has the impression, completely absent from Michelangelo's grave and deliberate composition, that He has unleashed forces that have passed beyond His control. All the world's sinners are being swept away in a cosmic catastrophe down the steep cataract in the distance, and then driven in confusion towards the shore where Charon's ferry-boat makes ready to push off.

In the foreground, a wild and dreamlike resurrection is in progress in which beauty and decay are mingled in deliberate confusion. The dead struggle upwards out of the earth that still seems to hold them back. Some are borne upwards by angels, meeting, as they ascend, the bodies of the damned flung downwards from above. Higher up, the pale sky is patterned with huge, dark clouds on which are seated the saints and martyrs.

In detail the painting is chaotic and the chaos is certainly half intentional, as though the end of the world were bound to produce an instant of utter confusion. But the general planning of the canvas is also confused in a way that I cannot think Tintoretto quite intended. He has evidently strained his powers of organization to the uttermost, but, for once, he has tried to do the impossible. Vasari's sneer is unworthy of a serious writer, but one understands why he uttered it. The academic mind has always fallen back on these two arguments whenever it has been confronted with an attempt to push the limits of expression further or

in a new direction. The new artist is always 'insincere' and his work is always 'confused.' The reader can easily find modern parallels to Vasari's criticism.

On the left of the choir, opposite to the *Last Judgment* and identical with it in shape and size is the *Worship of the Golden Calf* (Pl. 19), in which two separate incidents are sharply divided from each other by the horizontally stretched awning, but united by the steep cliff of Mount Sinai, half-hidden by lurid bands of cloud. Here the distribution of movement is reversed; the confusion—rather unsuitably—is in the upper portion enclosed by the curves of the Gothic arch. The Almighty sweeps down, head foremost, like a diving eagle, with the tables of the Law. A dazzling light radiates from His head, striking full on the figure of Moses, who stands on the summit, a pale figure against a luminous sky, his arms raised, his head ecstatically thrown back as though he were half-blinded by the intolerable light and the grandeur of the vision. Round the Deity, in no orderly rhythm but like excited birds assembling at a summons, huge angelic forms circle and dive through the upper air.

Below the awning the Israelites carry forward the Golden Calf and pour out their golden treasure on the ground. Women look down on the scene from a ledge on the mountain. Crowds are gathered on a distant hillside. Compared with the wild manœuvres in the air above, it is a comparatively orderly scene, artificially enlivened by rather unconvincing mannerist gestures, but full of Tintoretto's extraordinary genius for surprising modulation of light, and his usual love of inventing 'eyewitness' incidents like the woman under the awning who removes her friend's earrings, or the other woman who lifts the necklace from the stooping figure in the foreground. It is for this female figure that there are two surviving charcoal drawings, both made from a male model.

There is a tendency among art historians to attribute to the early sixties such a succession of important canvases by Tintoretto that even for so furious a painter the programme can hardly be credited. Half-consciously, I imagine, this dating is based on a desire to have them all accounted for before the artist starts work on the *Scuola* of San Rocco in 1564. But there is no reason to suppose that Jacopo would be more likely to refuse commissions after 1564 than before it. Devoted as he was to the *Scuola*, he could never,

at any time in his life, resist the temptation to undertake or even to beg for commissions. Certain of his paintings, notably *The Marriage at Cana* and the three narratives of *St. Mark* are known to have been finished before 1564, others were probably completed at the same period, but such undated pictures as are described below in this chapter I have only included as 'second decade' paintings for convenience.

*The Marriage at Cana* (Pl. 16) now in the Sacristy of Sta Maria della Salute, was painted in 1561 and—unusual in the case of pictures commissioned for his own city—signed 'J. Tintoretus f.' It was painted for the Confraternity of the Crociferi, in whose possession it remained until their dissolution in 1657.

It is one of the most formal, yet one of the most elaborate of those interior scenes that were manifestly based on a constructed model. There is a curious insistence, in almost all Tintoretto's pictures of domestic interiors, on the cooking and catering arrangements. It is almost as though Tintoretto the 'popolano' were protesting against the pageantry of Veronese's banquets by putting in a plea for the kitchen staff and the servants. The vast room, opening at the far end in three arches on to a sky patterned with clouds, is lit by a row of windows from one side only. Close under the windows, so that the shadow cuts it longitudinally in two, stretches the long table crowded with guests, men on the left, women on the right, forming, as Ruskin describes it in the Venetian index to the *Stones of Venice*, 'one broad sunbeam made up of fair faces and golden hair.' (Ruskin failed to notice the bridegroom, seated on the bride's left hand.) Jesus, with His Mother on His left, sits at its far end, the most distant figure of them all. On the right-hand side of the room the servants, under the direction of a stately major-domo, move to and fro, prominent among them a German woman, an alien intruder from a drawing by Dürer.

The painting resembles the *Presentation* in the Madonna dell' Orto both in the meticulous care lavished on the architectural accessories and in its division into light and dark areas invading the picture in depth. But it resembles it also in another respect. It is an extreme example of Tintoretto's method of planning in depth in such a way that at no point in the mind's progress into the picture is there any pause. No awkward or unexplained spatial passages occur anywhere. Again, as was noted in the *Presentation of the Virgin*, it is



comparatively easy for an artist to invent a device—a long table, a flight of steps seen from below, an avenue in a garden—which will compel the spectator to think mainly of the depth rather than of the breadth of the picture. It is easy, though few Venetians had done it before Tintoretto, and such Florentines and Central Italians as had made a point of doing it had been chiefly concerned with showing off their knowledge of perspective. But Tintoretto was not engaged here or elsewhere in an essay in perspective but in establishing a space to contain a drama and his truly remarkable achievement lies in the disposition of the drama within the space. No other artist has ever equalled him in this. Just as in the *Presentation* it is impossible not to see the dramatic connection between the three main figures so widely separated in space, so in the *Marriage at Cana* the immense crowd of guests, servants and spectators are strung together, as it were, on a thread that runs from foreground to background without a break. Tintoretto grasps the whole scene in a single imaginative effort. He has no 'favourite passages' in his paintings on which he asks the spectator to dwell. The layout of the crowded floor space and the placing of every incident, in it from the man stooping to lift the wine jar to the silhouettes framed in the distant arches, is as clear as the unbroken run of carved beams and fluttering decorations on the ceiling. And although this unexpectedly detailed treatment of the ceiling—every moulding is minutely specified—was doubtless carried out by studio assistants, it was certainly Tintoretto's wish that it should be carried out in just that way in order to make the whole area of the canvas equally expressive. The picture certainly has a focal centre—the head of Christ at the far end of the table, surrounded by an aureole of light and placed at the very point where the long perspective lines intersect. But though this is the dramatic focal point, it is not the picture's real subject. The convincing creation of space, the filling of that space with forms that will give it unity and take their unity from it is his main objective.

Veronese, who had begun to paint his series of great festal scenes in precisely this year—the first was his *Emmaus*; the second, his *Marriage at Cana*, now in the Louvre, was finished in 1563—never attempted anything so pictorially ambitious, though, superficially, he seems more elaborate. Veronese has none of Tintoretto's desire to fill space. He can and does create it but only as a background.

He merely elaborates, though with a better understanding of light and atmosphere, the system of his own predecessor in pageantry, Carpaccio. Spatially his pictures divide themselves into two halves, his foreground figures have their own environment, ample enough for their needs, but for no more than that. Then comes a visual break, and behind it another vista which certainly carries the eye back, but is, dramatically, unoccupied. It is in fact a background if not a backcloth. Looking back from this, or from the *Feast in Levi's House* painted ten years later, in the Venetian Accademia, to Tintoretto's *Marriage at Cana*, one realizes that the word 'background' has no meaning in Tintoretto's vocabulary. Not in this, nor with rare exceptions in any other painting, does he think in terms of background.

On the 21st of June in the following year, 1562, Tommaso Ranzone, a doctor from Ravenna, obtained the permission of the Scuola Grande of San Marco to commission, at his own expense, a series of pictures relating to the history of St. Mark. It was an undertaking after Tintoretto's heart. On the tympanum over the left-hand doorway to the Basilica of St. Mark is a fourteenth-century mosaic showing the procession bearing the body of the Saint into the church after its long and adventurous journey from Alexandria, in the ninth century. It was then that St. Mark replaced St. Theodore as patron of the city of Venice. Surely no city was ever more affectionately conscious of its patron saint or felt that its government and institutions were more closely bound up with his symbol, the winged lion. Every Venetian of Tintoretto's time knew the legend of how the Saint on his way by sea from Aquileia to Rome, at the bidding of St. Peter, ran aground on a sandbank, and how he heard the voice of an angel saying 'Peace be to thee, Mark, here shall thy body rest,' and how the angelic voice prophesied the building of a great city on the same spot.

Thomas of Ravenna did not commission the narrative of this particular adventure till 1568, and the painting in the Accademia—by some attributed to Domenico—does not belong to the series of three that resulted from the commission of 1562. Two of these are in the Accademia, the third—the *Finding of the Body*—is now in the Brera at Milan.

The Brera painting (Pl. 20) and the *Removal of the Body* (Pl. 21) are almost exaggeratedly typical of Tintoretto's approach to pic-

torial narrative. 'This,' one can almost imagine him explaining, 'is what one would have seen had one chanced to be present at the event. Visual truth is stranger and far more picturesque than fiction.' Even the fact that interpretations of the *Finding of the Body* vary is typical. This is the kind of confusion that does in fact arise in the crisis of an event. Down a grandiose vaulted passage, lit only by a mysterious reflected light from the floor, and from a distant torch, the searchers are examining the sarcophagi that line the right-hand wall—so high that ladders are needed to reach them. From one of them a body is being lowered, head foremost. At the far end two kneeling men peer down into a vault and examine it by the light of a torch that is illuminating the opening and casts fantastic shadows on its lifted trap-door. A naked corpse fiercely foreshortened lies on an Oriental rug near the foreground.

Suddenly, in the left foreground, as though he had unexpectedly stepped into the picture, the Saint himself—or rather his spiritual presence—appears and imperiously raises his hand to signify that the search is finished. A group on the right start back in terror, clinging to each other. Tommaso Rangone kneels rather smugly in the middle distance and seems to take credit for the success of the whole enterprise. One guesses that Tintoretto has reluctantly consented to introduce this irrelevant portrait at the donor's request. The picture would not suffer from its removal. But whose is the corpse? Is it the body of the Saint himself, or is it that of a certain Claudius which had been removed from its grave and kept in readiness to be substituted for that of the Saint? And is the body being removed from the sarcophagus that of another unknown? And is the apparition ordering them to replace it, or telling them they have at last found what they were seeking? These are exactly the kind of doubts that would assail a newly arrived eyewitness and I am inclined to think that Tintoretto intended to be as vivid as he could in describing the scene, but a trifle ambiguous in explaining it.

In the *Removal of the Body* Rangone again intrudes himself, the only self-satisfied figure in a scene of wild and melodramatic happenings. Again one is invited to explore an immensely long perspective, this time in the open air—a piazza with a squared marble pavement whose lines help to carry the eye back to the Palladian church at the far end. In the foreground Rangone and his friends

are engaged in raising the naked body of the Saint on to the back of a camel. With the same effect of awful suddenness implicit in the appearance of the Saint in the Brera picture, a thunderstorm has broken loose over the piazza. Flashes of forked lightning cut across the lurid sky and through the heavy clouds; rain descends in torrents pouring off the roofs of the buildings, swirling round the feet of the rescuers. The Alexandrians, who have been attempting to interfere with the rescue, scatter, rushing for shelter under the arcade of the piazza. A horseman in full flight disappears round the far corner of the square, leaving it quite empty but for the camel-driver who has been thrown off his feet but still hangs on to the guide rope.

The picture, as can be seen in an engraving (No. 45 in Lovisa's *Gran Teatro delle Pitture e Prospettive di Venezia*) has been severely cut down on the left where a young man—presumably one of the Venetian party—tears at the cloak of an escaping Alexandrian. To-day the head and shoulders of the young man and a corner of the cloak are all that are visible of an incident that would have helped to explain the action of the picture.

But it would not help to explain its El Greco-like mood. That is sufficiently established by the hot, lurid sky, the livid phosphorescent edges of the pallid buildings and above all the sinister emptiness of the piazza. Tintoretto, with his genius for filling space, is here inspired to leave it empty. John Martin, the Victorian romantic who specialized in thunderbolts from heaven striking terror into the hearts of men, never succeeded in producing better melodrama than this.

The third picture of the series, the *Rescue of the Saracen*, is more conventional, but for Tintoretto to apply the same imaginative approach to a shipwreck that he had achieved so adequately with a storm in a piazza or a torchlight adventure in a corridor, was hardly possible. Tintoretto had probably only the vaguest notion of a storm at sea. Yet, despite his lack of essential experience, the picture is by no means a failure. In the middle distance the crow's-nest of a large vessel is about to be engulfed by an oncoming wave—a wave that would have been very different if Jacopo had ever had closer experience of an angry sea. A figure clinging to it leans over in an attempt to rescue his drowning companion. In the foreground is the ship's small boat crowded with survivors, among



whom Rangone appears, for the third time. The Saint sweeps down and lifts with miraculous ease his converted Saracen disciple out of the confusion in the boat. Here Tintoretto's imagination is working completely within its natural frontiers. The lighting and gestures are magnificent, but it is just the kind of magnificence that one expects from Tintoretto—the curious combination of grace with power that occurs throughout his work—and the picture is not all of one piece. The miracle is a studio miracle, and the seascape, spirited though it is, is not part of it.

Another of the rare pictures in which Tintoretto has followed the Veronesian plan of adding an architectural background to a complicated foreground group is the *Finding of the Cross by St. Helena* in the little church of S. Maria Mater Domini. The Scuola Del SS. Sacramento, for which it was painted, was not founded till 1561, which gives a *terminus post quem*. I include it in this chapter for convenience, but I find it stylistically baffling. The architectural background is so formalized and naïve as to look like a copy of one of Sebastian Serlio's woodcuts of architectural stage settings. The figures, on the other hand, are disposed with Tintoretto's usual mastery though without any of his dramatic surprises, unless one is surprised by the kneeling figure who extracts the nails from the cross. For Tintoretto it is an academic exercise, yet it has a magical attraction due entirely to the group of tall women in pale robes on the right of the picture. They have strayed into it mysteriously as though from a drawing by Parmigiano; they echo the curves of St. Helena's robe, and they turn the picture (on such small things depends the difference between an admirable painting and a haunting one) into a never-failing delight. One's eye slides inevitably over to the right and lingers on the queer but noble group. The only other objects of interest are the three heads on the extreme left, portraits obviously, and full of that small extra emphasis that always occurs when a portrait is inserted into an idealized group.

Finally it will be convenient to end this chapter with the two *Last Suppers* of San Trovaso and San Polo (Pls. 22 and 23).

Tintoretto could always find a new meaning in this solemn theme. The *Last Supper* of San Marcuola was one of his earliest paintings. That of San Giorgio Maggiore was almost his last.

There is another in the church of San Simeone Grande (almost impossible to see, being in a dark corner), another in the Sacristy of Santo Stefano and another in the Scuola of San Rocco. In none of these does Tintoretto repeat himself. One characteristic only is common to them all. The artist insists upon the intrusion of the outside world. In the earlier San Marcuola version this outer world is represented by two symbolic women, "Faith and Charity," who move towards the table from the outer edges of the picture. In San Trovaso, San Polo and San Simeone Grande, vistas open at the back or sides, beggars and children gather round as though to participate in the sacrament. At the Scuola of San Rocco two beggars, a man and a woman with their dog, occupy the foreground. At San Giorgio Maggiore, the only one of the long series in which there is a sense of enclosure, the servants are as closely bound up with the narrative as the disciples and a mysterious company of angels fills the air above the table. Never does Tintoretto imagine the self-contained company of thirteen engaged in a species of private ritual that was traditional throughout the fifteenth century. Always one feels that what Jesus shares with and passes on to His disciples, they, in turn, pass on to the rest of humanity.

Apart from this reiterated conception, which was very personal to Tintoretto, and which always involved him in his favourite problem, the organization of space, each of his *Last Suppers* is different in plan and in mood.

That in the church of San Trovaso is almost certainly the earliest. It is also, despite the vividness with which each figure has been imagined and designed, the least intense and certainly the least reverent. There is even something that uncomfortably foreshadows the Dutch genre painters of the next century in the insistence on the still-life element in it—the foreshortened overturned chair that attracts so much attention to itself, the rather hard painting of the table furnishings, the chair in the corner filled with books and personal possessions, the cloaks hastily flung over the handrails on either side of the flight of steps on the left. It is in details like this that one is tempted to detect the hands of studio assistants from Northern Europe.

He has chosen Leonardo's moment, 'One of you will betray Me,' and he has, within the limits of his more rhetorical vision,

taken the same pains as Leonardo to express the effect of the speech on each separate member of the twelve. Even the overturned chair, distracting as it is, is part of this anxiety to be explicit. Its late occupant has leaped to his feet and hurried round to the far side of the table to protest. The picture's weakness—and it is a weakness only by comparison with Tintoretto's other versions of the theme—is that each of the disciples is so separately imagined that, despite the impeccable planning of the whole, it still lacks unity. One finds oneself examining it piecemeal almost as one would a Jan Steen or a group by Franz Hals, whereas the *Cena* of San Polo, though equally complex as an organization, can be taken in at a glance, like a Rembrandt.

Taken together, and in relation to the achievements of seventeenth-century Holland, the two pictures reveal the exact quality of Tintoretto's power. It is significant that here, in these almost desperately serious attempts to interpret the very core of the New Testament, one can no longer compare Tintoretto with Titian or Michelangelo, as one was bound to do in the case of the *Miracle of the Slave*, or the Adam and Eve cycle of the Trinità Scuola. The physical grandeur of the High Renaissance has been left behind. An uneasy, troubled mystery has taken its place. Yet—and this is the key to Tintoretto's genius as a religious painter—this troubled soul of man is still seen in terms of strictly factual narrative. Unlike El Greco, who was equally concerned with it, Tintoretto does not reduce it to abstract terms, or remove it into idealized space. He forestalls the robust materialism of Rembrandt, insists that the world is built on solid foundations, that a loaf of bread is edible, that drapery is made of cloth and not of flame, that human beings behave anecdotally in a given situation and not as though they had been caught up into some cosmic rhythm. And yet, despite all this materialism he is a mystic. Neither the sensuous beauty of Titian nor the prosaic tangibility of Franz Hals makes any contribution to his art.

I suspect that this apparent contradiction, this mystical result achieved by materialist means, is what has always made Tintoretto a difficult artist. Titian is so much more lovable because his world is so much more desirable; Rembrandt is so much more understandable because, profound as he is, his world is our own familiar world. Miracles not only do not, but cannot happen in it. I suspect

that mankind is roughly divided into day-dreamers who long for just what Titian can give them so abundantly, and practical persons who find that Rembrandt fills their own practical world with a depth of meaning that they, too, long for. But Tintoretto satisfies neither the day-dreamer nor the practical man. Or rather he gives to both of them more than they bargained for. And that 'more' is precisely the kind of 'more' that turns a supper in 'a large upper room furnished' into a sacrament. It cannot be explained in more precise terms. One can only say that visible and audible ritual is always a symbol of something that lies behind ritual; but that different men have different notions of what ritual appropriately symbolists the basic idea; and that Tintoretto, unlike all his predecessors, managed to make his ritual surprisingly unassuming and unglamorous without depriving it of any of its solemnity or its meaning; and that after him, the same outward materialism was never able to contain the same inner solemnity until, with the Dutch seventeenth century, it ceased to be ritual at all.

It is true that Tintoretto was born at precisely the moment when this could be achieved. The Counter Reformation, that outburst of militant insistence on spiritual values inspired by the Jesuits which followed on the colourful sunset of the Italian Renaissance, used Tintoretto as one of its chief instruments. In one sense he was its product, but in another he was one of its most potent tools. The spirit of the moment was propitious for his art. But only an unusual mind could have made it manifest in visible terms. Even Veronese, in many ways the ideal Counter Reformation artist of the period, found himself in trouble with the Inquisition in Venice for exaggerating the pageantry of Christianity at the expense of its spiritual meaning. Such a criticism could never have been directed at Tintoretto.

In both these *Last Suppers* nothing could be removed or altered without weakening their spiritual message. In San Trovaso it is the announcement of impending betrayal that provides the clue; in San Polo the ritual breaking of bread, a less poignant but a more solemn theme. In each case the composition is dictated by the moment chosen. In the first, each disciple reacts as an individual, in the second the group is united in the symbolic act of receiving the bread. Individuals no longer count. What makes the picture is the energetic but reverent rhythm that runs through the whole



company. The solitary figure standing with bowed head, on the right, seems to indicate the spirit in which Tintoretto wished the spectator to approach his picture.

The extraordinary skill with which he has distributed the lighting in these two canvases has already been noted. In the first, the radiant vista at the back with the two distant women bathed in its light, is necessary as a foil to the half-light in which the disciples sit. In the second the same effect is produced by the violent sunset, the Rubens-like glimpse of landscape with the trees casting long shadows on the hillsides, the façade and little circular temple catching the warm light of the setting sun.

But these lighting plots of pictures that combine the indoor and the outdoor world are too elaborate for laborious literary description. The reader must gather what he can from the reproductions.

## Chapter Eight

### THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO

THE ALBERGO, 1564-6

THE word Scuola is untranslatable. No institution at all resembling the Venetian Scuola existed in any other city of Italy. Not that the functions of a Venetian "School" were unfamiliar or unnecessary elsewhere in Italy, but no other city has ever managed to group together, within the limits of a single organization, such a variety of activities. In Venice, governed as it was by an aristocracy, and therefore acutely conscious of the social position of the individual citizen and of the social stratification of the mass of its citizens, the Scuola was the one civic institution that cut across social strata. The constitutions of the Venetian Scuole, in whatever way they differed from each other, were alike in this, that membership took little account of social position.

They had a strong religious basis. Each Scuola was firmly linked to the cult of a particular saint and usually possessed a relic, but was not attached to a particular church or parish. Behind this religious façade, each Scuola acted almost as a tiny republic within the larger framework of the Venetian republic. Each had its own strongly developed *esprit de corps*, helped its members, dispensed charity to those of the confraternity who needed assistance, even provided dowries for daughters of the members. Each expressed, in its own way, its loyalty to the Venetian State. The particular Scuola with which this chapter is concerned, provided 130 men for the Venetian fleet in 1519. In 1587, at the request of the government, it made a contribution of the equivalent of £17,000 to the treasury.

And, just as the Scuola contributed to the State, so the members made gifts and bequests to their Scuola. A considerable accumulation of wealth often resulted, and the temptation to self-aggrandizement was not always resisted. It was natural that the wealthier

Scuole should build themselves magnificent premises and furnish them magnificently. But when some of them attempted to use their influence for political ends, they tended to clash with the central interests of the government, and a time came when the Council of Ten was compelled to revise their constitutions by legislation.

But this was, on the whole, a later development. During the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries, the Six Scuole Grande of Venice combined in various degrees the functions of a club, a masonic lodge, a semi-religious society, a guild, a trades union, an insurance company, a savings bank, a charitable humanitarian organization and a small semi-independent democracy within the framework of a containing aristocracy. The smaller and less ambitious Scuole were less complex in function, but the total number of them was more than a hundred and fifty and their membership included nearly two-thirds of the adult population of the city.

*Esprit de corps*, such as organizations of this kind were bound to engender, could not fail to express itself in art and ritual. Some of the most charming aspects of Venetian pageantry, in a city that specialized in official and semi-official pageantry, and some of the most endearing works of Venetian art owe their origin to the Scuole. Each Scuola celebrated its Saint's day with a solemn procession, the central point of which was the Saint's reliquary. And on the greatest of all the Venetian festivals, the Feast of the Ascension, all the Scuole of Venice took part in a combined parade.

Every visitor who has been present in the Piazza of San Marco at the procession on the feast of Corpus Christi and has noted how little it has changed its character since Gentile Bellini painted his detailed picture of it for the Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista in 1494, must feel that this surviving specimen of Venetian pageantry holds the clue to the ritual aspect of the Scuole at the end of the fifteenth century.

The works of art commissioned by these confraternities have survived in larger numbers than their annual processions, but even so, we possess only a fraction of what once existed. Some of them have perished by fire, others are scattered. Only three great collections are intact; the Carpaccio series of the legend of St. Ursula now in the Accademia, the same artist's series of narrative paintings

for the Scuola of St. George of the Slavonians, and the Tintoretto of the Scuola of San Rocco, still in the rooms and in the exact positions on wall and ceiling for which they were painted.

The Venetian Scuola paintings have a character of their own, for they are religious in theme yet secular by origin. The church had no part in the commissioning of them. Consequently the artists who painted them felt none of the restraint imposed by a formal altarpiece designed for a church. They felt free to indulge in narrative—occasionally playful and preferably animated. It is probable that Carpaccio would never have discovered his own genius for informal, colourful narrative art without the patronage of the Scuola of St. Ursula. He would never have painted so spirited a picture of contemporary Venice as the *Miracle of the Holy Cross* but for the opportunity given him by the Scuola of St. John the Evangelist.

This type of secular narrative, hung on to a religious peg, was typical of one aspect of Venetian art. Neither the pomp required by the Ducal Palace nor the traditionalism demanded by the Church could have produced it. And it is important, in considering Tintoretto's San Rocco paintings, to remember that he too was working under conditions of patronage that allowed the greatest possible freedom of interpretation to any theme, however solemn. One has only to compare the *Annunciation* he painted for the Church of San Rocco with the Scuola *Annunciation*, to see the difference. The first is a logical development from a thousand Annunciations painted for churches since Giotto's version in the Scrovegni Chapel in the early fourteenth century. The second is a narrative of fantastic daring, the like of which had never been seen before.

The Scuola of San Rocco was a comparatively late foundation. It came into existence following a decree of the Council of Ten in 1478. The church dedicated to the Saint was not finished till 1508. The foundation stone of the Scuola, on the opposite side of the Salizzada that leads from the church of San Rocco to the great church of the Frari a hundred yards away, was laid in 1517 by the Patriarch of Venice. Financial delays and petty squabbles with Bartolomeo Bon, the first architect, delayed the building, which was not completed till 1545. The plan of the structure is simple



—a large hall on the ground floor, an imposing staircase leading to an equally large assembly room on the upper floor, out of which opens a smaller room—the Albergo.

The first hint of plans for decorating the interior with paintings is the offer, by Titian, aged seventy-six, to paint a picture for the longest wall of the Albergo, in 1553—the wall on which, twelve years later, Tintoretto was to place his *Crucifixion*. The offer was accepted by the confraternity but the picture was never painted.

On the 22nd of May, 1564, the brethren decided to decorate the Albergo and to defray the cost by private subscription. The carving and gilding of the panelled ceiling was undertaken at once and a competition inaugurated between invited artists for the central oval panel—the subject to be the Saint in Glory. The artists named were Paolo Veronese, Giuseppe Salviati, Taddeo Zuccaro and Tintoretto. The confraternity's negotiations and the decisions taken at their committee meetings are fully recorded in their minute books. Vasari, who visited Venice two years later, also tells the story of the competition which must have become, by that time, well known to the Venetian gossips. So that the first stages of Tintoretto's lifelong connection with the Scuola are among the few fully documented incidents in his life.

Nothing could be more typical. On the 22nd of June, the day on which the four competitors were to attend with their small-scale sketches of the proposed oval, Tintoretto arrived empty-handed and pointed to the ceiling. His not-quite-completed painting had been smuggled in a few days before and placed in position. Asked for an explanation he remarked, says Vasari, that that was his way of designing and that he knew no other. The committee, faced with a *fait accompli*, and a further threat from the painter that if the picture was not accepted he would make a personal gift of it to the Saint and his Scuola, voted, twenty against acceptance, thirty-one in favour. After this tactical success, Tintoretto found little difficulty in persuading the Scuola to commission him to complete the ceiling, and to undertake the long wall and the two smaller spaces on either side of the door in the opposite wall.

Typical as the incident was of Jacopo's methods, he had an added spur in the fact that when the decoration of the Albergo was under discussion, and members had been offering their personal subscriptions for the work, one of the members had promised fifteen ducats

on condition that the commission was not given to Tintoretto. But stimulating as the artist must have found this hostile gesture, his real reason was a deeper one.

The miraculous aspect of Christian story had a particular appeal to him. He was, as has been said, both a mystic and an optimist, and St. Roch, the healer, was of all saints the most congenial to him.

St. Roch was, indeed, particularly popular in Venice. Born in Languedoc towards the end of the thirteenth century, his exploits as a healer had won him local fame which was much increased when his effigy, carried through the streets of Constance, brought the plague then raging in the city to a sudden end. And when, during an epidemic of plague in Venice in 1485, a party of Venetians, emulating an earlier exploit with the body of St. Mark, stole the Saint's body from Montpellier and brought it to Venice, the doge and senate received it with civic honours. A church was dedicated to him forthwith, and the Scuola increased its popularity, attracting to itself in particular those citizens who interested themselves in charity and the care of the sick.

Tintoretto, characteristically, felt attracted to the spirit of the confraternity. He must have been equally attracted by the sight of the new and spacious interior with its great wall and ceiling spaces waiting to be filled. It is no wonder that he seized on the opportunity offered by the competition as he did. The three defeated competitors doubtless felt that Jacopo had behaved despicably. He, on the other hand, had secured a commission that was to occupy him fairly continuously for the next twenty-three years.

The oval panel itself, and the symbolic figures and purely decorative accessories which, together with the gilded and carved panelling, compose the ceiling of the Albergo, make a strange beginning to this vast series of paintings. They give no hint of the relentlessly serious vein in which he was to work. Anxious as he was to secure the commission, the *San Rocco in Glory* (Pl. 29) gives one rather the impression of an attempt to defeat competitors on their own ground than of a determination to be supremely himself. The sharp forshortening of the saint himself, who stands on the edge of the oval frame and looks upwards at the sweeping figure of the approaching Almighty, is more Tuscan than Venetian, as though

Tintoretto knew the kind of thing that Salviati would propose and wished to show that he too could be stalwart and impressive in the same way. The crescent-shaped group of angels seated round him have a Veronesian sweetness, the colour is brighter, less unified by light, than was Tintoretto's habit at this moment in his life.

To our eyes, the panel has more the look of fine manufacture on up-to-date but traditional lines than of inspiration. So too have the recumbent symbolic and allegorical figures that surround it. Doubtless Tintoretto knew how best to conduct a competitive campaign. The design was, by the standards of the time, academic and therefore safe: the method by which it was presented to the judges was unconventional and therefore likely to impress them even though it antagonized his fellow artists. But, in any case, in such an architectural context of gilded carving, a brightly coloured and comparatively academic design was not inappropriate, especially as Tintoretto well knew that if he could secure the commission for the wall paintings in the same room he would certainly be able to give full play to his violently unacademic temperament.

A fragment of a decorative frieze that formed part of the ceiling decoration, hitherto protected from the light, has recently been discovered—part of a border of fruit and leaves. It is of an astonishing brilliance and, removed from its context, no one would guess that it had been painted by a sixteenth-century Venetian, least of all by Tintoretto. It has the look of the late nineteenth-century *Ecole de Paris*, and if it could be regarded as a sample of Tintoretto's intention even in his gayest decorative vein, we would have to look at his output with new eyes and regard the whole of the San Rocco decorations as no more than a faded shadow of what they once were. But I doubt if it offers more than a distant clue to Tintoretto's intentions, even in the field of pure decoration. Our eyes, accustomed to the heightened colour-key of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, can easily accept the fragment as it stands. To the eyes of the mid-sixteenth century it must have seemed painfully disjointed in colour. The unifying glazes which, by sheer chance, it never received, would have given it a Venetian look. But even so, it would have been surprisingly gay and light-hearted for Jacopo.

The remainder of the ceiling decorations—the symbolic and allegorical reclining figures representing the Virtues and the Scuole



Grande, must have been executed at an extraordinary speed. Preparatory drawings for some of these figures survive—direct studies from the nude model. One guesses that their draperies were improvised on the canvas itself. For Tintoretto the provision of space-filling allegories was uncongenial hack work. He was anxious to complete this academic job and tackle the enormous space of the long wall opposite the door.

It seems almost incredible that he should have finished and signed this immense canvas in the following year, but nothing could be clearer than the inscription on the San Rocco *Crucifixion* (Pl. 26). MDLXV. TEMPORE MAGNIFICI DOMINI HIERONYMI ROTAE ET COLLEGARUM IACOBUS TINTORECTUS FACEBAT. Twice before—in the *Miracle of the Slave* and in the *Last Judgment*—he had tried, as it were, to outstrip himself, to astonish the beholder. He must have approached this commission in much the same spirit, but this time, with a very different effect. In the other two, one feels that he has strained his own immense powers almost to breaking point. In the *Crucifixion* there is a reserve of power. Tintoretto's directing mind, disposing, ordering, inventing, arranging, retained its equilibrium with ease from end to end of the crowded scene. He is building up a tragic drama on the largest possible scale and of a poignancy that can only be compared to that of Shakespeare's *Lear*. Yet there is no forcing of gesture, no unnatural intensification, no melodrama. Calmly Tintoretto shows us the awful event, and calmly we stand before it, as though it were taking place behind a veil. For once Tintoretto does not ask us to participate, because, for once, this is not the kind of happening into which a man may intrude without somehow belittling it. For once, Tintoretto allows his drama to enact itself on the stage so that it can be contemplated, but not shared.

The stage is vast, spreading out sideways and receding to distant horizons, larger and more real than the auditorium from which the spectator contemplates it. Only in retrospect can one grasp the picture's full meaning, just as only in retrospect and not in the presence of the work itself can one grasp the meaning of those rare works of art which contain within a vast expanse of space or time a single unity of mood and thought—Tolstoi's *War and Peace* for example, or Beethoven's Seventh and Ninth Symphonies, or the *Odyssey*. In retrospect one becomes aware of



having, for a time, been projected into a world closely linked with the world of one's own inner life, yet more intense, more varied and more heroic; of having known it intimately, shared all its confusing detail, and bitterly regretted leaving it behind. Yet because it has been left behind the detail becomes coherent, the whole becomes intelligible.

Such works are infrequent, and not many of the greatest creations of genius come into their category. The perfection of Hellenic architecture, the faultless serenity of the Sistine *Madonna*, the closely knit concentration of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, have nothing to do with this Tintorettesque willingness to accept everything that the world contains, to absorb it, digest it, however serene or violent, however urgent or withdrawn, and present it as an organized, integrated whole. Usually genius works by selection. The artist accepts only that which will add weight to his message. Tintoretto himself worked for the most part in this manner, rejecting whatever was uncongenial to him. But at this moment of his life when the San Rocco *Crucifixion* was painted, no level of human experience seems to have been unacceptable. And, once accepted, there was nothing that could not be woven by him into the texture of his canvas or made to contribute to its cumulative effect.

For this reason, the picture cannot be described in words just as the *Odyssey* or the Seventh Symphony cannot be described in words. I suspect that Ruskin, in the Venetian index to the *Stones of Venice*, had reserved his vividest descriptive passage for the *Crucifixion* but found the task impossible and preferred to startle his readers by the famous sentence, 'I must leave this picture to work its will on the spectator for it is beyond all analysis and above all praise.'

For Tintoretto's purpose, the *Crucifixion* was the only possible subject, for no other painted narrative would have given him the opportunity to group so vast a congregation of human activities round the single figure that suffers in isolation and yet is aware of all that is happening in the world below. In a curious way the figure on the cross, isolated not only by the height of the cross but also by the golden aureole, pale against the threatening sky, *watches*; and by doing so, enables us to watch. Those seventy or eighty figures each intent on its own allotted task or carried away by its own private emotion, are seen, as it were, in a dream. Each one of them

has taken or is taking his part in the cruelty, or is horrified by it or, like the Roman horsemen at the edges of the picture, is watching it impassively or—more memorable still—is almost too concerned with his own affairs to be aware of it. Yet only in relation to the lonely watching figure does this world of action, indifference, suffering and waiting, have any meaning.

No other *Crucifixion* has even attempted to produce this particular effect of the Redeemer whom the world has slain, watching, in quiet detachment, the cruel antics and the personal griefs of a world still busy with its own affairs, a world that hardly even pauses to know what it has done.

Within the framework of this ambitious conception Tintoretto proceeds in his usual manner, imagining each separate incident as though it had just been reported to him by the messenger in a Greek tragedy. The methodical binding of one of the thieves to the cross on the right, the strenuous hoisting of the cross on the left, the huge pointed wedges that will hold the crosses erect, the man digging, the dice-throwers under the rock, the ass browsing on the palm leaves strewn only a few days before for Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, the athletic horseman on the left, in whom one is tempted to see a portrait of Tintoretto himself, and the heavy horseman on the right, surely a portrait of Pietro Aretino, the crowds gathered on the hillside, the sky livid with an oncoming storm and the trees bending under the wind that heralds it, the distant buildings, lurid against the approaching darkness—all these prepare for the climax, the wonderful group at the foot of the cross, gathered round the stricken Virgin. There are no meaningless figures and no passages in the landscape that are not fully realized. And, as usual, the figures are all closely related to each other. No single one is detached from the rest except the crucified Christ, and every group is firmly contained in the landscape it inhabits. And when one studies it piecemeal, it contains some of Tintoretto's most expressive single figures, for at least five of which separate drawings have been preserved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tietze, Venetian drawings 1585, 1664, 1702, 1594, 1710. Mary Pittaluga says that from the back of the canvas it is possible to see that some of the figures were sketched in in the nude and the draperies added. This was certainly Tintoretto's habit when time pressed. An example of it can be seen in the *Capture of St. Catherine* in the Accademia where the firm outline of the Saint's figure, drawn from a male model, can easily be traced under the brocaded dress.

Immediately on completion of the *Crucifixion*, Tintoretto set to work on the two pictures on either side of the door on the opposite wall. The *Christ before Pilate* has, I think, been overpraised. Tintoretto evidently had a very definite conception of how the scene was enacted—the massive architecture symbolizing Roman power dwarfing the crowd of spectators, and the pale, slender figure of Christ standing erect on the steps are not easily forgotten, but apart from this single figure the composition is weak and uninventive. It is unusual for Tintoretto to rely on the impact of a single figure. The *Carrying of the Cross*, on the other hand, is completely original. There is a strange weariness in the procession that winds with slow deliberation up the hill. Tintoretto has made full use of his favourite device—the counterchange of light figures on a dark ground with dark shapes silhouetted on a light ground—and by placing himself at the rear of the procession he sees the figure of Christ staggering forward on the skyline between a soldier who tugs at the rope and another who imperiously raises the Roman banner. The three crosses dominate the three figures who bear them, and they also dominate the composition with their hard, angry diagonals. If the Pilate picture is a statement about the power of Rome, this, with its awkward angles and its zig-zag arrangements, expresses Jewry's harshness and relentlessness.

Finally, the two paintings were linked by an *Ecce Homo* panel over the door. The decorations of the Albergo were completed in the space of two years. A payment of 250 ducats was made for the *Crucifixion* in March 1566, and a further sum for the completed room in November of the same year.

It was during these two years that Jacopo was elected as one of the 'Decani de tutt' anno' of the Scuola and became one of the two 'sindaci.'

At this point in the scheme that was eventually to fill the whole building with more than fifty major works on walls and ceilings, there was a pause of nearly eight years. It was not until the 6th of May, 1574, that the Scuola decided to renew the ceiling of the large upper room. The elaborate panelling and gilding were completed by May or June of the following year and the ceiling was ready to receive the paintings. The pause brought no relaxation in Jacopo's busy life, but for the purpose of continuity it will be

more convenient to describe in the next two chapters the history of the remaining Scuola pictures and those in the church of San Rocco. They were not completed until August 1587, twenty-three years after the *San Rocco in Glory* had been smuggled into the building and placed in position. During those years the work was broken off many times and started again, but whatever distractions Tintoretto may have had, and whatever outside commissions he undertook, the sense of continuity must always have been present in his mind. He was working to a carefully planned iconographical programme; the final effect of the two immense rooms, the Upper and the Lower Halls, must have been clear to him throughout.

Under such circumstances there is every reason for the biographer to break the chronological sequence and try to follow the working of Tintoretto's mind as it tackled each problem in the Scuola—first the ceiling of the Upper Hall, then the wall paintings, and finally the Lower Hall.



## Chapter Nine

### THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO

THE UPPER HALL, 1575-81

THE history of the commission for the ceiling panels and wall paintings in the Upper Hall is recorded in the minute books of the Scuola. The ceiling panelling was ready by the end of May 1575. On the 2nd of June Jacopo approached the committee with an offer to paint the large central panel—the *Brazen Serpent*—and a year later undertook to have it finished by the Feast of the Saint (16th of August) and to make a gift of it to the school. In January of the following year he promised to execute two further ‘big’ pictures for the ceiling in return for his expenses and the price of the materials used. Towards the end of the month he received thirty ducats for the canvas and colours of these two paintings. On the 25th of March he begged to be allowed to complete the ceiling on any terms the Scuola might decide. The three pictures already undertaken were by this time finished and in position, the *Brazen Serpent*, the *Fall of Manna* and *Moses striking the Rock*. In November he made the proposal which was to regulate all his dealings with the Scuola and establish him finally as its official artist. In acknowledging the receipt of 200 ducats for the work already done, he declared himself anxious to dedicate himself to the glory of the Scuola and of the adjoining church of San Rocco, promised to prepare the wall paintings for the Upper Room and any others required, to deliver three finished pictures each year on the Saint’s feast day, and proposed to work for a salary of 100 ducats a year, payable in advance, for the rest of his life, inclusive of all expenses except the cost of ultramarine.

The tempting proposal was passed by a majority of forty-five on the 2nd of December, and the first instalment of 100 ducats was

paid the next day. The same sum was paid regularly each year. The last payment was made on the 1st of May, 1594. He died on the last day of the same month.

Not often can an artist have found himself in such an enviable position. Rubens, undertaking an equally ambitious series of paintings for Marie de Médicis's apartments in the Luxembourg, found himself under an obligation to produce allegorical flattery on a scale that he must often have found irksome. Michelangelo's letters, written during the execution of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, are those of a man who grudges the time spent away from the more congenial task of carving. Giotto, in the Scrovegni Chapel, must sometimes have felt the heavy hand of traditional iconography restraining the free flight of his dramatic imagination.

Tintoretto, working for an enlightened independent committee, with a majority vote behind him, a congenial, indeed an ideal programme ahead of him, a time-table which cannot have frightened him at all and a Venetian tradition which gave the authors of Scuola paintings an unusually free hand in the interpretation of their given themes, must have considered himself the most fortunate of men. Ambitious as he was, his ambition was neither for worldly success nor for immediate popular acclaim. It was precisely for what the Scuola of San Rocco had to offer him—a living wage to be paid annually, an iconographical scheme that gave him just the opportunity he needed, a committee that would not interfere with his furiously personal interpretations of Old and New Testament story, and wall spaces large enough to allow him to work on the scale that appealed to him most, with over-life-sized figures moving easily in their settings.

The iconographical scheme is an elaborate one, and the committee of the Scuola must have planned it in full detail long before Tintoretto started work on the Upper Hall. An entry in the minutes of the Scuola, dated the 1st of November, 1575, records that "voting took place about the wall paintings." Since, at this stage, Tintoretto had not secured the full commission for the ceiling, it seems likely that the members were discussing not the artist but the subject-matter, a question of importance to an age deeply interested in allegory and symbolism.

Since it had evidently been decided that the history of the Saint

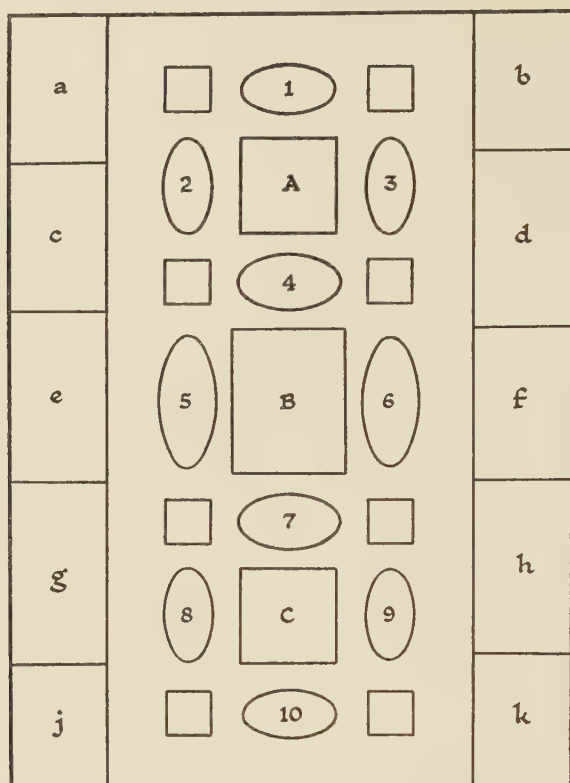
himself should be dealt with in the church, the whole of New and Old Testament narrative was at the disposal of the Scuola. In view of the Saint's character the emphasis naturally fell on the themes of healing and miracle, but in accordance with tradition handed down from medieval times, the correspondence between the Old and the New Testament had also to be taken into account. Consequently each group of Old Testament subjects on the ceiling is closely connected with the New Testament paintings on the walls below. Sometimes the correspondence is a little obscure, but there is no doubt that not only the choice but also the placing of the subjects was planned with great deliberation.

The ceiling, an unusually elaborate affair, contains twenty-one panels in all, of which the three largest, rectangular in shape, establish the three main themes. The biggest of these, the central panel, and the first to be painted, is the *Brazen Serpent*—the archetype of healing by miracle. Nearer to the altar is the *Gathering of Manna*—signifying miraculous succour by food, and at the end furthest from the altar—*Moses striking the Rock*—miraculous succour by water. With the exception of the panel furthest from the altar (No. 1 on diagram), the *Temptation of Adam*, each of the oval ceiling panels can be associated with one of the three central panels (marked A, B and C) and each of the wall pictures is related to one of the three ceiling groups, with the exception of the two nearest to the *Temptation of Adam*.

Thus, a, 1 and b form a kind of introduction to the whole. *The Temptation of Adam* is flanked by the *Nativity* on the right wall) as the spectator stands with his back to the altar) and the *Temptation of Christ* on the left. The two temptations are obviously connected. The connection between the Fall and the Nativity is less obvious but is clearly expressed in St. Paul's Epistles. Phrases like 'For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive,' must have been in the minds of the confraternity in deciding on this introductory trio of paintings.

Then comes the theme of succour by water in which the subjects chosen are not very consistent, and rather confused with the story of Moses. The entirely appropriate *Passage of the Red Sea* to the left of the main panel is not very suitably balanced by the *Vision of Moses* on the right; next to the central panel on the altar side is *Jonah Rescued from the Whale*. The corresponding pair of wall

SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO : THE UPPER HALL. DISPOSITION OF CEILING AND  
WALL PANELS



NOTE : The small square ceiling panels contain paintings in *grisaille* with identifiable subjects, but they are unimportant and, in any case, have been repainted out of recognition by later restorers.

ICONOGRAPHICAL SCHEME

	Introduction	Miraculous Succour by Water	Succour by Divine Intervention	Miraculous Succour by Food
Ceiling paintings	1. The Temptation of Adam	A. Moses Striking the Rock 2. The Passage of the Red Sea 3. The Vision of Moses 4. Jonah rescued from the Whale	B. The Brazen Serpent 5. Jacob's Dream 6. Ezekiel's Vision 7. The Saving of Isaac from Sacrifice	C. The Gathering of Manna 8. Elisha's Multiplication of the Loaves 9. Elijah Fed by the Angel 10. The Paschal Feast
Wall paintings	a. The Temptation of Christ b. The Nativity	c. The Pool of Bethesda d. The Baptism	e. The Ascension f. The Resurrection g. The Raising of Lazarus h. The Agony in the Garden	j. The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes k. The Last Supper



pictures are on the left, the *Pool of Bethesda* and on the right, the *Baptism*, symbolizing spiritual purification by water.

Succour by divine intervention occupies the central portion of the ceiling and four wall paintings, two on either side, are linked with it. *Jacob's Dream* and the *Ezekiel's Vision* fill the ovals to right and left of the *Brazen Serpent*: the oval below it, on the altar side, depicts the *Saving of Isaac from Sacrifice*. On the left wall, flanking the *Brazen Serpent*, is the *Ascension*, on the right, the *Resurrection*—spiritual equivalents of the main theme: next to them, on the left, the *Raising of Lazarus*, on the right, the *Agony in the Garden*—typifying victory over death.

The third group, associated with feeding the hungry, and centring round the *Gathering of Manna*, comprises the three oval ceiling panels, *Elisha's multiplication of Loaves*, *Elijah fed by the Angel* and the *Paschal Feast*. On the walls are the corresponding New Testament subjects, the miracle of the *Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes* on the left, the *Last Supper* on the right—the material and the mystical distribution of bread.

An altarpiece—the *Vision of St. Roch*—and two single figures at the opposite end of the hall—*St. Roch* and *St. Sebastian*—complete the painted decoration.

To the average visitor to the Scuola, the fact that a planned iconographical scheme underlies the whole decorative conception, is doubtless unimportant. A reshuffling of the smaller ceiling panels would probably pass unnoticed. Tintoretto certainly had in mind, as he designed the wall paintings, all kinds of correspondences of tonality, rhythm, and relative scale, and certainly if their positions were altered the visitor would be conscious that harmony had been disturbed. But he would not be aware of any disturbance in the moral or the theological message. Once the total effect of the Upper Hall, its fine proportions, elaborate ceiling, solemn wall paintings and intricate carved dado (added a century later) has been grasped, the spectator naturally turns his attention to details, examining each panel in turn, unconscious of any literary connection between them. It is impossible for the modern mind to regard such an interior as a sermon on a large scale. The literary or moral element in a single painting is often closely connected with its formal design—should, in fact, exercise a mild dictatorship over its formal design—but there can be no possibility of an

aesthetic unity in a series of paintings connected by nothing more than a theological link.

Yet however unconscious the spectator may be of the iconographical coherence of the San Rocco scheme, it is of the utmost importance to the artist—and particularly to an artist of Tintoretto's temperament—that such a scheme should exist and that it should *seem* important to the authorities who commissioned him. Merely to be given a free hand and to be told to evolve a pleasing decorative effect will not do, even though for the spectator the decorative effect is the first thing to be noticed and the cumulative effect of subject-matter is never noticed at all. The designer of a road is always conscious of its destination. The traveller can afford to ignore it and to enjoy the scenery. "Art for art's sake" may be a justifiable slogan for the consumer of art: never for the producer. It is not even a possible frame of mind for the producer. When an artist proclaims his allegiance to it, calling a portrait of his Mother an arrangement in black and grey, or the Ascension an essay in vertical rhythms, one can be sure that he is merely indulging in the exaggerated insincerity that the rebel artist is often forced to adopt.

Tintoretto was no rebel as Whistler would have understood the term. If he had felt inclined to put into words his creed as a painter, he would probably have insisted that his predecessors in the Venetian tradition had been too symphonic, too decorative, too anxious to achieve beauty and too little conscious of the moral issues involved in narrative art. Black and grey is often the basis of his colour scheme on the walls of San Rocco, but of all Venetian paintings they were the last to which the word 'arrangement' could have been applied. Among Ridolfi's list of Tintoretto's sayings is one to the effect that black and white were the most important colours in the painter's palette.

It may seem a strange saying coming from the man who had earlier written 'The colour of Titian' on his studio wall. But with advancing years, Tintoretto tended more and more to make a sharp division between the lyrical and the dramatic moods in painting, and more and more did he tend to reserve colour of the opulent Venetian kind for his lyrical pictures and to make his profoundest dramatic statements in something nearly approaching monochrome.

The result, in a room which, until the recent installation of adequate artificial light, was itself a gloomy one, is the reverse of colourful, and one may be sure that this was partly Tintoretto's intention. But the San Rocco pictures suffer to-day from past neglect. The confraternity were proud enough of their artistic heritage, but were quite ignorant as to how to preserve it. A long period of neglect, followed, in 1741, by a sudden realization that something must be done to protect the paintings from complete decay, resulted in a report drawn up in 1777 recommending that as many as eighteen of the pictures should be removed and replaced by copies. The recommendation was not adopted, but extensive restorations, disastrous in the case of some of the smaller panels, were carried out in the following year. Not the darkness of the general tone, but the deadness of the surface, due to insensitive restoration and disintegrated varnish, is what intervenes, to-day, between the visitor and Tintoretto's intentions.

The *Brazen Serpent* is not one of Tintoretto's grandest designs. Like the two great vertical canvases of the Madonna dell' Orto, it has an uncomfortable, restless turbulence, but, like them, it expresses, as no other artist could, the intervention of heavenly power in human affairs, the struggle between good and evil, between damnation and salvation. Above, the stormy sky is filled with the onrush of the Almighty, accompanied by a cohort of angels; below, on a fantastic, rocky hillside, lie the stricken Israelites. On the skyline Moses points with a magnificent gesture to the fiery serpent above his head. For Moses Tintoretto always had a special sympathy as the solitary leader, beset with difficulties, but never defeated by them. Unconsciously he may have identified himself with him. Here, he is silhouetted against the sky, isolated but confident. Other figures on the skyline contribute to the movement. It is, in fact, this distant skyline that provides the key to the picture. Above are the heavenly rescuers, below, the earthly sufferers; on the dividing line between them, the miracle. In a scheme devoted to the miraculous, and in this, the central miracle, Tintoretto rivets the spectator's eye on the distant centre, where earth and sky meet.

It is his complete command of spatial design that enables him to do this. Earth and sky both retreat inwards, as though they were

the upper and lower surfaces of a huge hollow wedge into which the spectator gazes towards the line where the two planes join.

*Moses Striking the Rock* and the *Gathering of Manna*, each designed within a square, offer Tintoretto less opportunity for dividing his theme into an earthly and a celestial section. Yet the opposition is there in each case. In each case he suggests an intimate relationship—almost a conspiratorial understanding—between God and His chosen instrument, Moses. In the first, the Almighty leans confidentially over the edge of a cloud while Moses looks up at Him as he strikes the rock and the water gushes in a generous arc over his head. In the second, He can be seen through a radiant gap in dark clouds directing Moses who energetically passes on the directions from the foreground.

The oval panels that group themselves round the central rectangles were not meant to be studied in detail. Indeed, until the present lighting system was installed, they were difficult to decipher, and Tintoretto must have intended them to play a very subordinate role among the ornate gilded carving that surrounds them. Now that they can be seen clearly, one is tempted to examine them individually. They are revealed as a series of pictorial ideas varying in expressiveness between clumsy overemphasis and mystery. The *Temptation of Adam* (Pl. 28) is unforgettable. Jacopo's earlier picture of the same subject in the Accademia was a simple pastoral. This is full of guilt and secrecy. Eve, her body gleaming out of the darkness of the forest, leans backwards, leading Adam on. Adam crouches, timidly following her retreating movement like a suspicious animal, and timidly stretches out his hand for the apple. Dramatically, Tintoretto is right to emphasize these overtones of guilt, in what amounts to the opening scene of a play. The whole of the rest of the Hall is filled with variations on the theme of redemption.

Yet Tintoretto instinctively makes a distinction between the Old and the New Testament redemption. Man and God are somehow more closely related in the Old Testament series. God gesticulates in friendly intimacy with Jonah as he steps out of the jaws of a vast but unconvincing whale. The angel lays a persuasively restraining hand on Abraham's arm raised for the sacrifice of his son. Old Testament redemption is practical: that of the New Testament spiritual.



From the purely pictorial point of view, it is worth noting that Tintoretto follows—indeed he played a major part in inventing—the Venetian formula for ceiling paintings. The problem of deciding on an optical point of view is always a difficult one when the spectator is asked to gaze at a representational work of art immediately over his head. To ignore the picture's position and to treat it as though it were a wall painting placed horizontally is plainly unsatisfactory. Michelangelo had done it in the earlier sections of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, but in his case the disadvantage of the system is minimized by the curved section of the ceiling and by his virtual ignoring of landscape or architectural settings. One is only acutely aware of the awkwardness of the system in the 'Flood' panel, where Michelangelo has been forced to imagine a widely spread, though extremely elementary landscape to contain his crowds of figures.

Even more difficult is the problem of narrative painting if the artist decides to adopt a worm's-eye view and identify his system of perspective with that of the spectator. Mantegna had experimented with this 'hole-in-the-ceiling' method, on a small scale, in the Sala dei Sposi in the Palace at Mantua. Correggio had adopted it at Parma, Tintoretto himself had used it with moderate success in the *San Rocco in Glory* on the ceiling of the Albergo, and Tiepolo was to carry it to remarkable lengths in the eighteenth century, but obviously the method could only be of service in the representation of celestial visions.

The Venetian ceiling painters of the sixteenth century invented an unexpectedly convincing compromise between these two logical extremes. Figures are thought of as being seen from below at an angle of about 45 degrees, and the perspectives of landscape and particularly of architecture defy all logic. If the reader will take the trouble to imagine Veronese's great ceiling panel of the *Apotheosis of Venice* in the Doge's Palace emptied of its crowd of figures he will find that the elaborate architectural setting that remains is governed by no laws of perspective. Titian had experimented with the method in 1543 when he painted the ceiling panels now in Santa Maria della Salute.

This was Tintoretto's method at San Rocco, his first full-scale attempt at solving the problem. He solved it sensibly rather than brilliantly, for he was not by nature a decorator. Both at San

Rocco and in the Ducal Palace he was called upon to carry out ambitious ceiling schemes, but it is not by them that he is remembered. Veronese's reputation could easily rest on the ceiling panels of the Doge's Palace. But the memory one carries away from the Upper Hall in the Scuola of San Rocco is of the ten wall paintings.

The series begins in a truly startling manner, with the *Nativity* (Pl. 36) and the *Temptation* (Pl. 32). It is in these two that one first becomes conscious of Tintoretto's unshakable confidence in himself under the stimulus of an annual salary of a hundred ducats, an obligation to produce three pictures each year, a signed contract empowering him to continue with the work until the building would hold no more pictures—beyond that, absolute freedom to invent and to create, to ignore old traditions, to inaugurate new ones, to be utterly fearless. Only a very few human souls in the history of art have been strong enough to stand the strain of this kind of unhampered creativeness. It is not enough, for such a purpose, to be a great painter, or a great designer, or even to be so visually sensitive to the beauty of man and Nature that the work of art becomes itself an act of praise. Botticelli, Giovanni Bellini, Titian, Watteau, Renoir—all had this sort of greatness, but the creative energy that Tintoretto was called upon to use at this period of his life was drawn from something deeper, and the result, though less delectable—even less lovable—was more than an act of praise. It was an act of belief. Tintoretto was pervaded by that sense of militant holiness which was the keynote of the Counter Reformation and which produced the fierce, rhetorical drive of the Inquisition and of Baroque architecture. The Gospels were to him both real, in a material sense, and mystical. Therefore their ultimate meanings could be interpreted pictorially by the most realistic kind of method.

Only when an artist is in this exceptional frame of mind can he create, pictorially, without hesitation, using all the available material in the world of the senses in order to give full meaning to the world of the spirit.

I have already pointed out that this was Tintoretto's approach in the *Last Suppers* of San Trovaso and San Polo. Here he extends that approach to even more difficult themes. Nothing could be more robust, less 'poetized' than the San Rocco *Nativity*. He

has no need of the tremulous ecstasies of a Botticelli or the hushed reverence of a Piero. Here is the loft that contains the manger, seen from below because he, Tintoretto, has come upon it from below. It is roofless. Through an untidy mess of beams and joists one sees the sky and a couple of flying putti. Lying uncomfortably, in a tangle of straw, the Virgin lifts the veil and exposes the newborn Christ child lying in a dilapidated cane basket. Below, among recumbent cows, a pecking cock, the usual disorderliness of farm outbuildings, the shepherds fussily attend on the event, chattering and handing up plates of food. The description could easily fit some second-rate Dutch master of the seventeenth century. What, to the despair of the writer, can never find its way into the description is the sense of an *exceptional* happening, of the solemnity that belongs to a unique occasion. It is distressing to be able to find no words to explain so important an ingredient in Tintoretto's art. But I can only suggest that in Tintoretto there are two elements that are always absent from Dutch painting. One is that infallible sense of rhythmic grace that runs through the whole of Italian art and attains a particular solemn sweetness in the art of Venice. No figure in Bellini, Cima, Giorgione, Bonifazio, Titian or Tintoretto is without it. Tintoretto's swift charcoal drawings, that seem to have a continuous ripple of faultless movement running through them, isolate this quality in Venetian figure drawing. And Tintoretto, who of all painters strove to keep his inspiration fresh, down to the last brush-stroke on his canvas, retained this rhythmic grace in his finished pictures.

The other element belongs rather to Tintoretto than to Venice, and it counteracts the Venetian sweetness. It is a sort of robust urgency which imposes on every figure a sense of the *importance* of the action performed, however commonplace. In this, Tintoretto's narrative is rather like Browning's. It moves powerfully, never pausing to ask 'is this the poetical, the dignified way to behave?' Like Tintoretto, Browning used every ingredient in the everyday world of the senses, and transmuted them not by 'poetizing' them but by infusing them with his own optimistic vitality.

Many artists have painted successful Nativities, for most men know the atmosphere of the house when a newly born babe has arrived. But temptation—man's struggle with his conscience—is

not essentially a paintable subject. There was a time when St. Anthony provided many Flemish artists with a good deal of picturesque subject-matter and an excuse for *diableries* of an innocent kind. Earlier Italian artists had taken over a harmless and rather ridiculous Devil from the medieval world, but Christ—the Christ of Duccio's *Temptation* in the *Maestà*, for example—never seemed in serious danger of succumbing in the battle of wills. Tintoretto knew the difficulty and tackled it with a remarkable result. This temptation of Christ was to be a parallel, an equivalent on a much deeper level of experience, to that of Adam. Here was no struggle between simple golden-age humans, but between the embodiments of Good and Evil. And the scales must not be weighted too heavily on the side of Good. Evil, like Eve, must be attractive. Tintoretto's Satan is, even for him, an extraordinary conception, a compound of healthy, physical beauty with an uncomfortable hint of Eve's own voluptuousness. As he offers the stones to be turned to bread, he does not shrink back like Eve, but yearns forward, holding up his arms, throwing back his head, a memorable fusion of physical strength with epicene beauty. Jesus, above him on the mountain side, answers reasonably, almost argumentatively. Tintoretto's Jesus, throughout the whole corpus of his paintings, is a fairly consistent and by no means traditional type. He is a slight, rather wiry figure, graceful in movement, often energetic, but above all, intelligent. His gestures are those of a quick-witted, friendly leader, meek in the presence of force, submissive to the authority of Pilate, but ready, as here, to meet His moral opponents on equal terms. This *Temptation* is not so much a battle of wills as a debate between emotion and reason. Jesus makes his point, as Italians do, with urgent gestures of the hands. His head is encircled with a burst of radiance which spills downwards on to Satan's upturned face and glitters among the leaves in the unoccupied corner of the canvas. Jacopo's Christ is noble enough, but he is the secondary character in the drama. The picture's hero is the half-naked Miltonic fallen angel wearing jewelled bracelets on his beautifully rounded upper arms.

Next in order, the *Baptism* (Pl. 38) hangs opposite to the *Pool of Bethesda*. The latter I can only regard as a failure. Few artists would willingly undertake to paint a crowd of diseased and crippled creatures. I can imagine Daumier (but hardly any other painter)



making it acceptable without avoiding the real issue. The High Renaissance with its emphasis on physical nobility, instinctively avoided such themes, and, if compelled to depict them, did so by stressing the healer and the miracle of healing and by virtually ignoring the symptoms of disease. Tintoretto, too honest a man to evade his responsibilities as a narrator, has tried to do the impossible, and the result is a painting at which no one can look for long with comfort. No amount of careful grouping, no ingenious manipulation of light could give it even a formal beauty, for the essence of it is a congested crowd of individual sufferers, united by no emotional bond, and therefore linked by no compositional pattern. Raphael's grand generalizations might conceivably have made the theme tolerable. Tintoretto's dramatic conscience will not allow him to do so. Ruskin's 'I wish Tintoret had not condescended to paint it' is understandable. Yet one cannot help marvelling at a man who would rather produce a repellent—an aesthetically repellent—painting than take refuge in an artificial sweetening of the theme.

As though anxious to echo this grimness, the *Baptism* is surprisingly gloomy. A dark crag climbs almost vertically up the right-hand side, and in its shadow half-seen figures undress and prepare to step into the Jordan. Dark clouds roll upwards in a threatening sky, against which dark trees are silhouetted. The water itself is dark and the figures of Christ and the Baptist in the middle distance are introduced almost half-heartedly. What is brilliantly done is the crowd of waiting figures on the distant shore, furiously painted, in an arabesque of whirling white lines. They seem carved rather than delineated. They are tempestuously sculptured ghosts silhouetted radiantly against the dark forest behind them. This is virtuosity of the most daring kind, and if, as I suspect, the picture has been largely restored, the restorer's hand has hesitated to touch this remarkable passage. The handwriting is exactly as Tintoretto left it. The only other odd feature in the painting is a personage—plainly a portrait, probably a member of the confraternity—who intrudes himself inappropriately on the extreme right.

The next pair of wall paintings, the *Resurrection* and *Ascension*, are less arresting as interpretations only because we are accustomed to being astonished by the themes themselves. They are pictorially rewarding subjects; many Renaissance painters had

already responded to their stimulus. Tintoretto's *Resurrection* is a very different conception from that of Piero, but it is less convincing and less vivid. In no sense does Tintoretto's imaginative world seem to make that of Piero obsolete. But in any case, each of the two paintings, so similar in theme, forms the central panel of the wall. Symmetry of design never appealed to Tintoretto, but in this case, for the sake of marking the centre of the wall, symmetry was, at least, desirable. They establish, as it were, a pause in the narrative sequence. They are formal centrepieces in so far as Tintoretto was capable of being formal.

Tintoretto's Christ soars up from the tomb in a burst of light. He emerges like a butterfly released from its chrysalis, as a team of angels swings back the heavy lid of the sarcophagus. The subsidiary incidents are hardly noticeable. The sleeping sentries in the foreground merge into the landscape, the two Marys approach undramatically in the distance. The picture is impressive but conventionally impressive.

The *Ascension* (Pl. 37) is conceived in much the same spirit, but it has, even more than the *Resurrection*, the air of a formal altarpiece. The curious sense that Jacopo, at his best, can give of having been privileged to share a secret, is absent. Or rather, this is one of those grand secrets that was shared by a host of Renaissance painters and Tintoretto has no advantage over them when he comes to tackle it. Energy there is in plenty, and the flashing edges of the angels' wings give an impression of lightning playing among dark clouds. The most original feature in the picture is the small scale of the figures gathered in the landscape below, as though the painter had a double point of view and were simultaneously looking upwards at the ascending Christ, and downwards on to the earth that is being left behind.

These two central panels can be regarded iconographically as being connected with the central theme of succour by miracle. But the *Resurrection* from the dead and the ascent into Heaven seem so remote from the notion of healing and comforting that I prefer to think of them as a kind of climax to the whole, the final victory of spiritual life over bodily death. Of the next pair, the *Raising of Lazarus* is plainly linked with the pervading theme of the Upper Hall. Its companion on the opposite wall, the *Agony in the Garden*, is certainly not easy to connect, theologically, with the

rest of the group, though it may have been chosen in order to stress the selflessness of Christ's miracles. Here was the moment in His life when no miracle, no act of self-salvation, was permitted. Both pictures are deeply impressive, and it would be a waste of time to speculate about the choice of subject when they contribute so potently to the general mood. Both are nocturnal and mysterious, and both are superb examples of Tintoretto's ability to see the implications of the supernatural through the veil of the natural.

Lazarus and the two figures who raise his body from the sarcophagus are seen high on a mound, silhouetted against the sky. Dark foliage hangs over their heads. A fig-tree breaks the surface of the sky with its crisp pattern of leaves. Christ, at the foot of the mound, seems to perform the miracle easily and from a distance. The onlookers gather behind; only their heads can be seen as they appear over the edge of the mound. A woman in the foreground kneels and gazes in astonishment, not at Lazarus but at Jesus.

It is a masterly example of Tintoretto's power to dispose his lights and darks regardless of what they fall on. The broken, flickering lights are arranged, as so often in Tintoretto's system of composition, centrifugally round an empty space in the middle of the canvas. At the edges of this emptiness the upper portions of Lazarus's helpers, the distant sky seen through the fig-tree, the forehead of Jesus, His knees, the head and shoulders of the kneeling woman and the grasses on the ledge behind her head, emerge out of the darkness, not as patches but as patterned areas of light. The only other area of light, unconnected with this circular scheme and dramatically arresting because it *is* unconnected, is the leg of Lazarus which emerges awkwardly, like an afterthought.

The *Agony in the Garden* (Pl. 33) is even more darkly mysterious. Such light as there is, consists of broken gleams which have edged their way out to three of the four corners of the canvas. The two sleeping disciples on the right pick up the light in long el Greco-like streaks. It falls on Peter's bald head as he raises himself sleepily, roused by the approach of Judas leading a dimly-seen procession to the betrayal. The lie of the land is inexplicable, for the procession seems to emerge from a cave under the hill on which Jesus lies awkwardly while the angel, rushing down from the upper right-hand corner, offers the cup. Round these two the foliage flashes eerily like a cloud of fireflies. The stems and branches on which it



grows are hardly visible in the darkness. It is one of the broadest, most furiously, and, in parts, carelessly painted of the wall pictures. No tender gradations soften its edges or relieve its tragedy. Sir Kenneth Clark has likened Constable's full-sized studies in oil to 'emotional discharges which allowed him to attack his final canvas without a feeling of frustration.' But here no 'final canvas' was possible, for in this 'emotional discharge' everything that needed saying had been said. I have likened Jacopo's *Crucifixion* in the Albergo to Shakespeare's *Lear*. This is on a smaller scale; it is like one of the heartrending single scenes in the play, in which the stricken King is surrounded by a little group of friends who can give him no support. In those scenes Shakespeare is economical of words. The speeches are surprising but never elaborate. He, like Tintoretto, found that given the right dramatic context, the description of a human being whose endurance is near to breaking-point can afford to be simple.

The last pair of wall paintings is the *Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes* and the *Last Supper* (Pl. 39). The former is the least inventive of the series. Evidently Tintoretto has not been moved, nor does he move us as he describes the miracle. The picture is a return to the matter of fact mood of the Old Testament panels on the ceiling. The crowd on the skyline is gracefully disposed: the foreground figures are no more than effective padding. It is the product of a tired mind.

In the *Last Supper* (there is no record of the order in which these wall paintings were executed, but one somehow guesses that Tintoretto was working both logically and chronologically from the far end of the room towards the altar) the subject rouses him again to an unusual pitch of elaborate imaginative creation.

Architecturally the scene is strangely complicated, with a floor on three levels, a dramatically valuable invention since it divides the picture in depth into a distant kitchen, a lower area set apart for the Supper, and a foreground lower still where those inhabitants of the outer world, whom Tintoretto always liked to introduce into his *Last Suppers*, could gather. Doors and passages lead off to the right in order to increase the sense of space and to give access to the everyday world outside. Thus, Jesus and His disciples exist and move in their own allotted space, yet are not cut off from the kitchen and the servants in the background, nor from the two



beggars in the foreground whose dog, with his forepaws on the steps, acts as a connecting link, nor from the outer world from which light streams in through the open doors.

Round the table, which is set diagonally, the disciples are seated, and chattering. No central figure dominates them: it is the end of the Supper and the party seems on the point of breaking up. But at the far end of the table a little group of three, Jesus, John, resting his head half on the table and half on Jesus' lap, and Peter who bends over Jesus' outstretched hand, have drawn apart. Judas, the light falling full on his back, watches them intently. The rest, engrossed in their conversation are unaware of what is happening, yet the distant group is the core of the picture. Tintoretto's Christ is again the smallish, solitary figure that runs through the whole series. There is a quiet friendly urgency in His pose, as though He were giving brief final instructions.

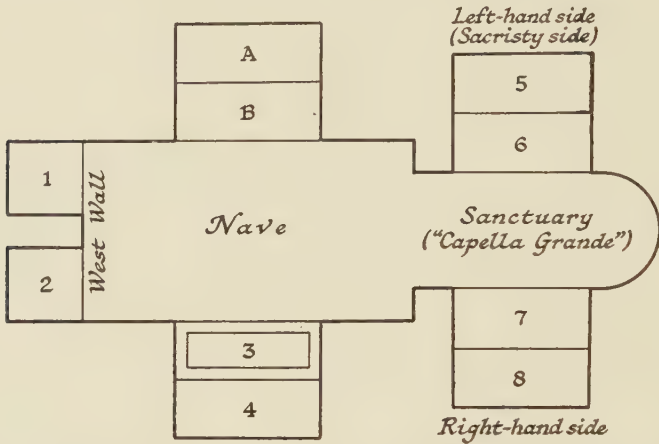
The altarpiece, the *Vision of St. Roch*, and the figures of *St. Roch* and *St. Sebastian* at the opposite end of the hall, are little more than space-filling panels. Doubtless they were commissioned, but Jacopo was in the mood for narrative during the late seventies and early eighties. The two figures have a rather forced nobility: the altarpiece is confused and painted without conviction.

There are two conflicting currents in Venetian painting—the sensuously decorative and the narrative. Giovanni Bellini could reconcile them whenever he wished, Titian did it occasionally, so did Veronese. But Tintoretto, like Carpaccio before him, had no suitable equipment when his theme lacked urgency. Just as Carpaccio painted masterpieces as long as he was concerned with the adventures of St. Ursula, and then relapsed into childish mediocrity when he came to paint the Saint in Glory, so Tintoretto, after his profound commentary on the life of Christ, had nothing to say when he painted the altarpiece of St. Roch. It is like the conventional title page to a book: it adds a certain dignity to the Upper Hall but adds nothing to its meaning.

## Chapter Ten

### THE CHURCH OF SAN ROCCO

THE church of San Rocco contains eight large paintings by Tintoretto:



1. *San Rocco before the Pope.*
2. *The Annunciation.*
3. *The Healing of the Paralytic.*
4. *The Capture of San Rocco.*
5. *San Rocco in the Desert.*
6. *San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison.*
7. *San Rocco Visiting the Plague-stricken in Hospital.*
8. *San Rocco among the Animals.*

A is a painting of *St. Martin and St. Christopher*, with later additions at the sides by Pordenone, which formerly decorated the double doors of a large cupboard, B a canvas by Fumiani (second half of the seventeenth century) of *Christ Scourging the Moneylenders in the Temple*.

The paintings are arranged in the church in three groups. Nos. 1 and 2, which were once organ doors, balance each other on the west wall. The rest are in pairs, one above the other. In the nave, A hangs above B on the left, 4 is above 3 on the right. In the sanctuary, 5 is above 6 on the left, 8 is above 7 on the right.

It will be remembered that it was not until 1577 that Tintoretto was appointed official artist not only to the Scuola but also to the church of San Rocco, in return for an annuity of 100 ducats a year, and that in the agreement he undertook to furnish such pictures as might be necessary for both buildings.

But by 1577 most of the paintings in the church had already been completed, and it is far from clear what the officials of the Scuola had in mind when they agreed that Tintoretto should complete the series of paintings for the church.

Of all the problems of dating with which the history of Tintoretto's work bristles, the eight pictures in the church of San Rocco have proved the most confusing to historians. In view of the strange contradictions between the various attempts to solve the problem it is worth while examining such evidence as exists.

Four documents in the records of the Scuola refer to paintings in the church:

(1) The 2nd of April, 1559, the record of the first of a series of payments on account for the *Healing of the Paralytic* in the nave.

(2) On the 11th of March, 1565, Tintoretto is welcomed as a member of the Scuola (eighty-five members voted in his favour, nineteen against) and it is recorded that 'at the end of 1549 a picture was executed by Messer Jacopo Tentoreto for the *Capella Granda* [the apse] in the church, in respect of which, in addition to the payment, it was decided to admit him to membership of our Scuola, which decision was forgotten at the time.'

(3) On the 13th of April, 1567, the following resolution is recorded: 'That three pictures be painted for the *Capella Grande* of our church, two above and one below, facing the other picture.' And finally,

(4) 'Expenses for the three pictures done in 1567 in the *Capella Grande* of the church paid to Giacomo Tentoretto in respect of the said pictures, one on the side of the sacristy [i.e. the left-hand side facing the altar,] the second on the other side, and above, the third, the tympanum placed in front of the Annunciation over the door of the Scuola, outside.'

It will be noted that none of the subjects of these pictures is named. Of the tympanum nothing is known.

The only other piece of documentary evidence is the following extract from the 1568 edition (the second, enlarged edition) of

Vasari's *Lives*: 'This artist [Tintoretto] received a commission for two paintings in oil, to be placed beneath the works of Pordenone in the principal chapel of the church of San Rocco. [Vasari is referring not to the St. Christopher and St. Martin panel in the nave but to the frescoes by Pordenone in the sanctuary, battered remains of which still exist.] These were to be of extent equal to the whole width of the chapel. . . . In one of these our artist painted a perspective view, as of a large hospital filled with beds, wherein the sick, who are receiving medical attendance from San Rocco, are lying in various attitudes; among these are certain nude figures which are very well done, with a dead body foreshortened which is most admirable. In another painting is a story, also from the life of San Rocco, in which there are many very beautiful and graceful figures. The work is so good a one, in short, that it is accounted one of the best ever executed by that painter. In the centre [i.e. in the nave] of the above-named church, moreover, there is a picture of almost equal size with those before-mentioned, and likewise by the hand of Tintoretto. This represents Our Saviour, Christ Healing the Sick at the Pool of Bethesda [*the Healing of the Paralytic*] and is a work which is also considered a reasonably good one.'

In view of the above evidence, therefore, all that we can be certain of is that (1) one painting for the sanctuary was done at the end of 1549 and hung on the lower level on the right-hand wall, (2) three paintings were ordered for the same part of the church in 1567 with the intention of completing the intended series of four for the sanctuary, (3) in the same year two of these paintings were finished, as well as a third, a lost tympanum which was to hang in the Scuola and which need not concern us, (4) in 1567 (or at the latest, early in 1568, if Vasari added a note while his book was being printed) there was one painting by Tintoretto in the nave, the *Healing of the Paralytic*, and three in the sanctuary, one of which showed San Rocco in hospital, another had some connection with the life of the saint, while the third, though delivered and paid for, is not mentioned by Vasari.

Of the four paintings that now hang in the sanctuary, the *San Rocco in Hospital*, so carefully described by Vasari, is obviously the earliest in style and can be safely identified with the unspecified painting of 1549. The only other picture hanging to-day in the



sanctuary which could be described as containing 'many beautiful and graceful figures' is the *San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison* which is placed opposite to it. One is tempted, therefore, to assume that this is the picture vaguely referred to by Vasari.

This clear evidence is, however, a little confused by the fact that the positions of the paintings in the church have been recently changed. Lorenzetti's *Guide to Venice* (1926) describes the original arrangement as follows:

*Nave.* Left-hand side, facing altar: above—the Pordenone cupboard doors; below—the Fumiani *Scourging*, both of which are in their original positions to-day. Right-hand side: above—*San Rocco in the Desert*, below—the *Healing of the Paralytic*. The latter is still 'in the centre' where Vasari saw it, but was then probably *above*, since Tintoretto originally painted it also for the two doors of a cupboard to balance Pordenone's work. It was at some later time removed from the cupboard, joined down the centre to make a single panel, enlarged with strips of canvas at the top and bottom to make it the same size as Fumiani's *Scourging*, and placed opposite to it on the lower level.

The sanctuary paintings were: On the left. Above—*San Rocco Captured at the Battle of Montpellier*; below—*San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison*. On the right. Above—*San Rocco with the Animals*; below—*San Rocco in Hospital*. In other words, Nos. 4 and 5 have changed places since they were taken down for the 1937 exhibition. This account of the arrangement is confirmed by Ridolfi, who, however, does not mention on which side of the sanctuary each picture was placed.

Therefore Vasari's picture containing 'beautiful and graceful figures' may have been either the *Prison* picture or the *Capture*, since they occupied the positions specified in the Scuola document of 1567. The wording of the document confirms this—'One on the side of the sacristy, the second on the other side and above.' The 'second,' which until 1937 was 'on the other side and above,' is the *Capture*. And though Vasari's phrase is certainly more applicable to the *Prison* picture, it is improbable that he had actually seen either of them when he visited Venice in the previous year. He had evidently visited the church and described in detail what he saw there, but relied on hearsay for his account of the paintings on which Tintoretto, at that very moment, must have been

working in his studio. It will be remembered that his description of the two great panels by Tintoretto in the *Madonna dell' Orto* gives the same impression—that he had seen the *Last Judgment* but only heard of the *Worship of the Golden Calf*.

The Hospital picture is the earliest and was certainly painted in 1549, despite the strange hesitation of certain writers<sup>1</sup> who, thinking that Tintoretto was incapable of painting such a picture so early in his career, have suggested that the date, quite clearly written in the records, must be a mistake for 1559. If there were any choice between the two dates it would be settled at once by the women's dresses. The *Prison* and the *Capture*, from their positions in the church, are also certainly those ordered in April 1567 and paid for at the end of the year. Stylistically, both paintings could have been done at any time after the middle sixties.

It remains to determine when the fourth picture in the sanctuary, *San Rocco with the Animals*, the upper painting on the right-hand side, was added: when the *San Rocco in the Desert*, now in the sanctuary but once on the right-hand side of the nave, was painted: and finally, what was the date of the *Annunciation* and *San Rocco before the Pope*, painted as covers to the organ but now framed and hanging on the West Wall.

As regards the fourth sanctuary picture, all one can say is that it had probably not been painted in 1577 when Tintoretto undertook to finish the series of pictures for the church, and that it was in position in 1584, since Borghini mentions it in his *Riposo della Pittura e della Sculptura* published in that year. The same applies to the two organ-door pictures on the West Wall. The *Healing of the Paralytic* cupboard doors are known to have been executed in 1559, the two portions sewn together and the whole enlarged before 1786, and the additions removed in 1937.

The nearest dating one can arrive at for the eight pictures is, then, as follows:

- (1) *San Rocco Healing the Plague-stricken in Hospital*, 1549.
- (2) *The Healing of the Paralytic*, 1559.
- (3) *San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison*, 1567.
- (4) *The Capture of San Rocco*, 1567.
- (5) *The Annunciation*, 1577–84.
- (6) *San Rocco before the Pope*, 1577–84.

<sup>1</sup> The suggestion was first made by Berliner (*Kunstchronik*, 1919–20, p. 495).

(7) *San Rocco with the Animals*, after 1577.

(8) *San Rocco in the Desert*, after 1577.

Elementary detective work of this kind is apt to be wearisome to the reader. My reason for introducing this rather laboured argument is that all previous writers seem to have omitted or ignored some small item of evidence and have therefore arrived at different and conflicting conclusions as to the order in which these pictures were painted.

Not all of the pictures are equally interesting, and the two late canvases that were once organ-doors, the *Annunciation* and the *San Rocco before the Pope*, have been so heavily restored as to have lost the crispness and vigour on which they once depended. The *Annunciation*, gracious though it is, is a conventionally imagined design; Veronese painted Annunciations in a similar mood and painted them with more fervour. It is almost as though Tintoretto had refused to project himself imaginatively into the narrative, knowing that a year or two later he was to paint the same subject in the Scuola and fill it with the very essence of his daemon.

But the three narratives from the life of the Saint—the hospital scene (Pl. 34), the prison scene (Pl. 35) and the capture of San Rocco—are in a different category. The first two, though eighteen years separate them, are evidently intended to balance each other. A mood almost of claustrophobia informs them both. In both one gropes in dark interiors crowded with uneasy human forms. In both there is a sordid grandeur. Tintoretto must have had a very definite conception of the rather squalid picturesqueness of the Saint's devoted labours among the unhappy and the afflicted. Any other artist before the advent of the Dutch school would have shrunk from such subjects—or, rather, would not have considered that they contained possible material for a painter. Even among the Dutch (with the exception of Rembrandt, who shrank from nothing) it was only the exceptional—and usually small-scale—talent of a Brouwer or an Adriaen van Ostade who could find beauty in the dark untidy picturesqueness of a cramped interior.

These two pictures of Tintoretto's are unique in their time and almost without parallel in Tintoretto's own *oeuvre*. It was not often that he so willingly abandoned heroics in order to come to closer terms with a theme that involved heroism. The earlier of

the two, the hospital picture, is a Rembrandt painted exactly a hundred years before its time. Never did two great artists seem to join hands so completely across a gap of a century, and for that reason one turns to Rembrandt in search of parallels. It is one of those test cases for which analysts of 'style' are always looking. Here are two men of roughly similar temperament who, at a given moment, have approached so near to each other in vision that the one seems a reincarnation of the other. Yet since no man, however personal his genius, can escape from the *Zeitgeist*, it would seem that here at last it might be possible to discover the fundamental difference between the spirit of one century and another. What is there in Tintoretto's picture that could *not* have been painted by Rembrandt? What, if Rembrandt had been commissioned to paint this same subject on a panel this size, would he have achieved that Tintoretto did not achieve?

One passes in review, one by one, all the pictures of figures in dark interiors of which Rembrandt painted so many, expecting to find a more or less close parallel to the *San Rocco in Hospital*. And, surprisingly, the picture one expects to find is not there. Despite the breadth of his humanity, Rembrandt never painted human beings so completely stripped of their finery and their pride as this. One has to turn to the more cynical and theatrical Hogarth to find this kind of subject treated so frankly. If, at this early moment in his career, in the year after he had painted the grandiose *Miracle of the Slave*, he had decided to pursue this new path of hard realism, dramatized and intensified not by rhythmic gesture and opulent colour but only by the impact of light, there would have been no need for the advent of a Caravaggio and Velasquez's debt to that uncompromising tenebrist would have been short-circuited straight back to Tintoretto.

In Rembrandt's hands the subject would have been almost unbearable, for the suffering of each individual would have been more closely observed and far more subtly painted. The grand generalizations that came so easily to the mid-sixteenth century take the edge off the individual tragedy. There is still something superhuman and idealized in the vision of Tintoretto's generation which has disappeared from that of Rembrandt. The woman leaning forward on the left and the woman with the tray of food and drink on the right are ministering angels and their gestures have a



certain angelic grace. Between them, in the gloom, Rembrandtian figures can be picked out—especially the standing man, his neighbour who is being bandaged, and the man on the couch whom the Saint himself is tending. But there is a bigger sweep, a less poignant drama in the sixteenth than in the seventeenth century, despite Tintoretto's attempt at pure realism. The picture reminds us of certain passages in Shakespeare in which prose and blank verse alternate, but the texture of the verse seems to transform the prose. In seventeenth-century Holland prose dominates: miracles cannot happen naturally there even in the most exalted moments. In sixteenth-century Venice miracles can occur easily, even in a busy hospital.

In the later picture of *San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison* (sometimes called the *Death of San Rocco*) Tintoretto permits himself a larger proportion of verse and a more aristocratic tone of voice. The presence of the huge angel—unseen by all but the Saint—destroys the Rembrandtian atmosphere and marks the picture as part of the rhetoric of the Counter Reformation. But grisly, realistic incidents abound, the oddest of which is the prisoner in the dungeon who has thrust his head and his amputated arm up through the grill. (Bercken and Mayer, and after them Tietze, have mistaken this for a head lying on the grating!) In the gap of eighteen years between the two paintings Tintoretto has matured. The grouping of the numerous figures is surer, the lighting broader and less strident, the separate incidents less disconnected, the whole canvas easier to take in at a single glance.

The *Capture of San Rocco at the Battle of Montpellier* was often dismissed as a workshop picture until it was cleaned at the time of the 1937 exhibition. Now that it can be properly seen in its new position in the nave of the church, it has become one of his most energetic and fiery inventions. There is a big preparatory painting (Frontispiece), over six feet long, one-third the size of the picture in the church, in a private collection in England, and there are just sufficient minor alterations and differences between the two versions to make it certain that Tintoretto painted both. Pupils or assistants would have copied the forms a little more closely and their share in the finished production would have been seen in the less vigorous handwriting. In both, the handwriting is the same. The differences between the two are in the nature of afterthoughts. The dark

figures of the Saint and his two captors who move off to the left of the picture leaving the battle raging behind them, are a little larger and a little more clearly defined in the larger version: the shattered tree in the middle distance leans over more sharply and its steeper angle seems to assist their departure: an explosion introduced into the bottom right-hand corner of the canvas explains the confusion of rearing and stumbling horses and a dimly seen army with spears replaces the patch of empty sky in the centre of the picture. The larger picture is more integrated, less patchy, and, as one would expect, more highly 'finished'—the smaller picture is related to the larger in much the same way as Constable's preparatory studies to his finished canvases—but the final version lacks none of the sweep and impetuosity of the 'sketch.' Earth and sky, horses and riders, the crashing tree and the flying banner are woven together into an even closer, more turbulent pattern.

These paintings make an extraordinary trilogy when one thinks of them as narratives from the life of a gentle hard-working saint. Yet they are in the lively tradition of Venetian narrative. Carpaccio's *St. Ursula* and *St. George* are surrounded by movement and excitement in just the same way. Tintoretto's stylistic approach to narrative is as unlike Carpaccio's as possible, but his willingness to join the throng and to stand just where the drama and the bustle are at their height is the same. By breaking away from the nobler and more formal classicism of Titian he was, in one sense, paving the way for fully-fledged baroque art, but in another he was picking up the threads of the old tradition at the point where they had been broken by the solemnity of the Venetian High Renaissance. The other two paintings from the life of the Saint are uninspired. One leaves the church uncertain whether one has really seen them or not.

The picture in the nave, however, the central motive of which is the Healing of the Paralytic, is a masterpiece. Tintoretto, like Turner, was spurred on by the strange delusion that all artists were his rivals and that each of them, if necessary, could be defeated on his own ground. It was certainly not what is usually called jealousy that moved him, but a conviction that what others could do he could do better; and, even more, a desire to have his ability officially recognized. Just as Turner set himself, from time to time, the task of deliberately out-painting Claude or Vandewelde or even Watteau,

so Tintoretto, for the sake of securing a commission, would deliberately adopt the manner of his competitors. Ridolfi even boasts of this odd weakness as though it were a virtue. It had gained him the victory in the competition for the Albergo ceiling in the Scuola of San Rocco; he had even offered to paint an altarpiece in the Gesuati church in the manner of Veronese and his offer had been accepted. To our eyes these pictures have no longer the air of *pastiches* which they must have had at the time. What Tintoretto saw as the keynote to Veronese's or Salviati's style is not what we see. But in the case of the *Healing of the Paralytic* in the church of San Rocco, it is quite evident to the eye of to-day, even without Ridolfi's statement that it was done 'in concorrenza col Pordenone,' that Tintoretto was being deliberately Pordenonesque, partly in an attempt to balance the existing doors of the reliquary cupboard and partly in a desire to outdo them. He took over Pordenone's scheme of foreground columns, splitting the picture into three unnecessary subdivisions (he repeated the arrangement in the *San Rocco in the Desert* which once hung on the same wall), crowded each compartment with figures more herculean in build and more ponderous in movement than was usual for him, and drew the whole composition into the foreground, adopting Pordenone's habit of making portions of them appear to project beyond the picture-frame. The huge paralytic is about to carry his bed *in front of* the foreground column, the man on the extreme left dangles his legs over the edge of the stylobate. Among this throng of giants Tintoretto introduces one creation of his own. The figure of Christ is his personal conception, small and agile, already turning sharply away to perform a new miracle.

But even without this no one could mistake the picture for a Pordenone. Any doubts as to the nature of Tintoretto's genius are dispelled by this spectacle of a man elaborately assuming a disguise and yet remaining supremely recognizable. The Pordenonesque tricks, the histrionics, the weight, the effect that the characters are intruding themselves on the spectator's notice by pushing forward beyond the frame, are there. But Pordenone's clumsiness, the strained inertia, are gone. In their place is a liveness and an ease. Among the thirty or so figures packed into the narrow space, not one assumes an awkward gesture, and not one is behaving unnaturally or filling in an empty space in the interests of the composition.

They have arranged themselves as an anxious crowd does arrange itself, mobile in detail, yet bound together by a dramatic focal point—the outstretched hand of Christ. His gesture affects the whole as a stone dropped into a pool, starting a series of concentric ripples which radiate outwards to its edges and are then forced back on themselves, meeting oncoming ripples and setting up little subsidiary collisions that are still related to the original impact. And if the spectator wishes to note Tintoretto's telltale signature, the *leit-motif* that is to be found in so many of his most successful compositions, he will find it in that dark hole in the centre, beneath and to the right of the outstretched hand. Pordenone was incapable of visualizing so sharply or of organizing so completely.

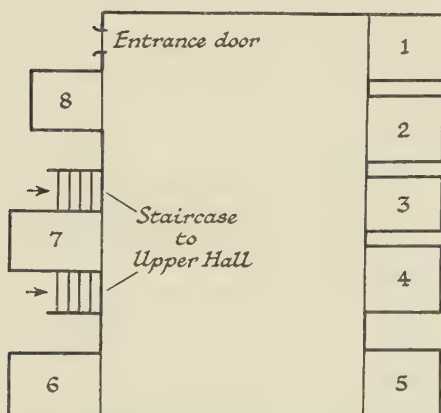


## Chapter Eleven

### THE SCUOLA OF SAN ROCCO

#### THE LOWER HALL, 1583-7

##### *Paintings in the Lower Hall*



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| 1. <i>The Annunciation.</i>              | 5. <i>St. Mary Magdalen.</i>              |
| 2. <i>The Adoration of the Magi.</i>     | 6. <i>St. Mary of Egypt.</i>              |
| 3. <i>The Flight into Egypt.</i>         | 7. <i>The Presentation in the Temple.</i> |
| 4. <i>The Massacre of the Innocents.</i> | 8. <i>The Assumption.</i>                 |

THE Upper Hall with the exception of the altarpiece was completed in July 1581. The minute books of the Scuola record no further plans for the building until July 1583, when there is a mention of ultramarine for three pictures "da baso," for the Lower Hall. It is natural that Tintoretto should have paused after the strenuous years of work on the Upper Hall. The gap of two years was filled by work for the church of San Rocco and elsewhere. Meanwhile it had been decided that the paintings in the Lower Hall should be concerned with the life of the Virgin.

The series, beginning with the *Annunciation* which faces the spectator as he enters the door, runs chronologically along the

whole of the long wall—the *Adoration of the Magi*; the *Flight into Egypt*; the *Massacre of the Innocents*; then come two narrow vertical panels, the *Magdalen in the Desert* and, facing it on the opposite wall, *St. Mary of Egypt*; two more paintings complete the series, the *Presentation in the Temple*, on the wall space between the double staircase that leads to the Upper Hall, and finally, between the staircase and the entrance door, the *Assumption*. Evidently belonging to the same series is the smaller *Visitation* which has now been placed on an easel in the Upper Hall, but the low skyline and the impression given of looking upwards at figures on a hilltop suggests that it was intended to be seen from below.

The theme of the Annunciation has always tested the imaginative power of the artist. There are so many ways in which he can envisage the relationship between the two figures. Brilliantly successful solutions of the problem by certain artists whose vision of the event was exceptionally clear and confident have hardened into tradition. The tradition has atrophied into cliché. Impatience with cliché has provoked later artists to a newer and fresher vision, which, in its turn, has hardened into cliché. The number of solutions is not inexhaustible, and, on the whole, artists have chosen one of two attitudes of mind.

In the first the Heavenly Messenger arrives, as all messengers should arrive, with a certain sense of his own importance and a conscientious desire to deliver the message clearly and accurately: while the Virgin, unprepared for the visitor, is either confused by the unexpectedness or overwhelmed by the honour of the announcement. In the second it is the messenger who is honoured and reverent, impressed not so much by the importance of the message as by the dignity of the person to whom it is to be given.

There are infinite possible variations of tension between the two protagonists, and some artists—Botticelli, for example—have successfully combined the two approaches. But, on the whole, every artist tends to identify himself either with the Angel or the Virgin and to interpret the event accordingly—Giotto and Fra Angelico with the Angel, Simone Martini and Lorenzo Lotto with the Virgin, to take two pairs of artists almost at random. Which point of view the artist feels to be the more reasonable matters little. Provided he feels that he is depicting an event violently charged

with inner meaning, a meeting between two persons in which the visible action is negligible but the implications astonishing, then a masterpiece can result. Tension there must be, or the picture ceases to convey its meaning. And it is by no means the greatest artists who have succeeded best in suggesting the strangeness of this momentary relationship between the Angel and the mortal. Fra Angelico could manage it easily: Titian, hardly at all.

Ecclesiastical tradition had early established a custom of placing the Angel and the Virgin on either side of the arch leading to the chancel, so that as they faced each other, a spatial barrier was set between them. And this barrier was, consciously or unconsciously, still felt to be necessary even when they came together on fresco or canvas. It may be no more formidable than the column of an arcaded loggia in the foreground or even the vase of lilies on the floor between them. It may even be nothing more than a compositional line, like the vertical line of the window in the background of Botticelli's *Annunciation* in the Uffizi. But however slight, it is a psychological barrier and part of the dramatic tension depends on it.

It is this barrier that forms the central feature of Tintoretto's *Annunciation* (Pl. 40), a massive shaft of masonry and brick that splits the picture vertically into uneven halves, dividing the room in which the Virgin sits from the world outside. Yet, sturdy though it is, it is a barrier no longer. Tintoretto's Angel, arriving at full speed in the vanguard of a host of flying putti, hurls himself across it, while the Virgin "not in meek reception of the adoring Messenger but startled by the rush of his horizontal and rattling wings, sits, not in the quiet loggia, not by the green pasture of the restored soul, but houseless, under the shelter of a palace vestibule ruined and abandoned, with the noise of the axe and the hammer in her ears."

There is no mistaking Ruskin's voice in that well-known passage in *Modern Painters*. But it is not a voice assumed for the occasion and made impressive by high-sounding words. The reader does not forget Tintoretto when he falls under the spell of Ruskin's rhetoric. For Tintoretto is here at the peak of his inspiration and Ruskin is manifestly too deeply impressed to care about being impressive. It is true that by the time he has finished describing the picture he has fallen under his own spell and has produced in himself an unnaturally exalted frame of mind in which he offers a symbolic interpretation of the picture that the modern reader

finds difficult to accept. To paint a ruined house in order to symbolize the crumbling Jewish dispensation was not consistent with Tintoretto's habit of mind, though in his fervent moods, such a thought could come easily to Ruskin.

But Ruskin's instinct is right. The word "inspiration," not a word to use lightly, certainly applies here. The picture is not only extraordinary, it is unforgettable. Its general plan—the wild onrush across the threshold, like a hurled javelin, that, by its very shape, forces the seated Virgin to lean back, not in shrinking modesty like Simone Martini's but under sheer physical pressure and even with a suggestion of overbalancing—must have come to Tintoretto in one of those flashes of vision that firmly establishes a mood but leaves technical problems to be solved afterwards. The technical problem, for Tintoretto, was how to give pictorial steadiness and stability to this tornado-like conception. Only the most insistent scheme of verticals and horizontals could achieve it. And no one could be more insistent, when he chose, than Tintoretto. The base of the ugly square shaft of brick and plaster is seen in full light set against the deepest shadow, and its vertical line is echoed first by the thickness of the wall on the far side of the door-opening, then by the dark wall of the carpenter's shed seen against a burst of light from the sky. The axis of the bed canopy above the Virgin's head carries the verticals over to the right, while steadying horizontals are provided by the black and white tiled floor, the angel's wing and the mattresses of the bed. Even the absurdly insistent joints between the bricks and the harsh edges of the masonry above them are necessary in order to counteract the violence of this celestial invasion.

One can imagine how Tintoretto, having established this mood, added the corroborative detail. How, for example, the effect of a 'ruined and abandoned' palace could be strengthened by the dilapidated rush-bottomed chair and the chaotic confusion of planks and carpenters' tools on the left. The twist of rope against the sky is another telling little addition. So, too, is Jacopo's conception of the Virgin Herself—a peasant girl with big coarse hands more intent, when the messenger arrived, on her needlework than on the book in her lap.

I have paused in front of this single picture, not because I think it is Tintoretto's best work but because it so supremely contains



his own special daemon, and because even he would not have had the courage to follow his daemon so single-mindedly anywhere but in the Scuola of San Rocco. In the Upper Hall, on an easel, opposite to his *Visitation*, is an *Annunciation* by Titian, bequeathed to the Scuola by a member of the confraternity thirty years before Tintoretto began this picture, and probably painted ten years earlier still. It is a pleasant conception and a very satisfying example of Venetian painting—the product of a painterly school at an exceptionally happy moment in its development rather than of a genius. But, even allowing for the change of taste during the forty-odd years that intervened between these two Annunciations, a change for which Tintoretto himself was largely responsible, one has only to pass from one to the other in order to realize the difference in kind between the two painters.

Titian's picture could hardly fail to be delightful. He was working within the framework of a traditional formula that was almost bound to produce a good picture though it is by no means a revealing Annunciation. Tintoretto—the Tintoretto of San Rocco—had almost abandoned the Venetian formula, though he was permeated with the Venetian spirit. It was as easy for him to fail as it was difficult for Titian. He was not dependent on a tradition but on his genius, and since it was a genius for projecting himself, imaginatively, into the meaning of an event, his picture could either be a magnificently daring reconstruction of the scheme, or, if his genius failed him, a disappointingly commonplace one, with nothing but his own mannerisms to recommend it. Under such circumstances the strain on his imaginative resources must have been far greater than most artists are prepared to endure. It is not surprising that it often proved too much for him: and when that happened, being an indefatigable worker and an impetuous character, he did not pause to recuperate but went on painting. Hence the number of disappointing, even of slightly repellent Tintoretto's. It is not even a question of keeping the creative imagination at white heat. There are times when one can guess that his power to visualize has not synchronized with his 'form' as a painter. The recklessness, the impatient desire to see his vision on the canvas, occasionally intervenes even when his vision is working most effectively. The finest Tintoretto's occur at those moments when inspiration and patience coincide.

That is, of course, a platitude which could be applied to any artist. But for an artist of Tintoretto's temperament it is so central a platitude that it has to be stated in order to explain him. The *Annunciation* was painted at one of those moments, and because of that, the safer excellences of Titian's version become almost uninteresting by contrast.

Only two of the Tintoretto's in the Lower Hall were conceived and executed in such moments. The second is the *Flight into Egypt* which occupies the central position on the same wall. Of the rest, the *Massacre of the Innocents* is a splendid failure uninspired as a whole though packed with bits of inspiration, the two narrow panels of the Marys are remarkable conceptions just spoiled by the scene-painter's reckless impatience, and the remaining three show signs of failing inspiration and a tired hand.

The phenomenon of a work of art that is uninspired—if 'uninspired' is the right word for a work of art that fails to arouse the spectator's imaginative responses, and yet is typical of the man who created it, could, in fact have been created by no one else—is worth a short digression. For the last ten minutes I have been looking at a good photograph of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, in some ways just as fruitful a method of studying it as to stand in front of it in Venice. One can isolate it more easily from its surroundings: and one can more easily note the relationship of group to group, mass to mass. After ten minutes' study it still refuses to cohere. It is not, to put it quite simply, the *Massacre of the Innocents*: it is a herculean attempt on Tintoretto's part to tackle the subject in paint. Here is a sprawling, defenceless woman, there is a ruthless, striding soldier: here is a mother falling over the parapet, and another preparing to jump, and, in a burst of light in the distance, a scared group of women pursued by soldiers. Every detail is vivid and every gesture is imagined as only Tintoretto could imagine it. Yet the picture has no cumulative power, though it is exactly the kind of picture that depends on cumulative power. And cumulative power depends on an elusive quality which I can only describe as a rhythm that runs through the whole of the work turning the sum of parts into a whole. It is a quality which one feels at once in the best of the Raphael frescoes in the Vatican Stanze. The *Parnassus* or the *Expulsion of Heliodorus* are as crowded and as full of action as Tintoretto's *Massacre*. Yet not only are they

coherent but their central quality is coherence. They strike with a single impact. One does not, in order to admire them, go over them piecemeal, picking out this splendid gesture or that finely imagined group.

None the less the *Massacre of the Innocents* is as typical of Tintoretto as the *Parnassus* is typical of Raphael. And if what is lacking in it is inspiration, the phenomenon is certainly worth explaining.

Every artist arrives at the full expression of himself by first of all occupying the ground cleared by his predecessors. It is not *his* ground but he is safe in it. He can use it as a base for operations though he cannot live in it. From this base he proceeds to make a series of raids on unexplored country, clearing new passages, opening up new possibilities, making new ground habitable not only for himself but for his successors. Starting confidently from the Schiavonesque or the Titianesque base, Tintoretto hacks a new path into virgin country, and as the path becomes cleared and negotiable, it becomes recognizable as the Tintorettesque. With each new excursion it becomes a little broader, a little more habitable, until in the end, the old base has been left behind. The newly cleared ground can be both a habitation for Tintoretto and a base from which his successors can, given the energy and the courage, push forward into post-Tintorettesque country.

The mystery of inspiration consists, I believe, in the fact that only when the artist is in the act of exploring new ground does he do his best work. There seems no good reason why this should be so unless it is that the excitement of discovery makes him capable of putting forth more than his usual strength and skill. But, as far at least, as Tintoretto is concerned, his most memorable works are those in which he has been most experimental and not those in which he is repeating one of his own successes. One might say that he saw most clearly when he was working in the dark.

Looking once more at the pictures in the Lower Hall of the Scuola, it is evident that Tintoretto was not seeing clearly when he painted the pedestrian *Presentation in the Temple*, that the *Adoration of the Magi*, despite exciting details, is almost a picture without a meaning, that the *Massacre of the Innocents* is a collection of superbly imagined fragments unconvincingly related to each other, and that the *Assumption* is no more than a good example of painter's rhetoric. It is only fair to Tintoretto to add that what we



see of the *Assumption* to-day is entirely the restoration of one Antonio Florian in 1784, and that Florian, basing his style on the late Titian, was so proud of his work that he added an inscription at the lower edge of the picture, in his own honour. The four remaining pictures—the *St. Mary of Egypt*, the *St. Mary Magdalene*, the *Flight into Egypt* and the *Visitation* were certainly painted in the full excitement of discovery.

Concerning the *Presentation in the Temple* nothing need be said. It is neither interesting as a conception nor does it contain any of those small flashes of intuitive genius with which Tintoretto often brings to life an otherwise conventional design.

The *Adoration of the Magi* is certainly conceived in a new way. It owes very little to previous interpretations of the theme, but originality is hardly a virtue unless it carries conviction with it. The picture contains, however, two memorable passages—the noble tenderness of the Virgin herself as she leans forward holding the Infant Jesus with a strong, extended hand, and the glimpse of a procession of ghostlike horsemen through the opening at the back, as good an example as can be found anywhere of the 'fulminante pennello' which so impressed Boschini. Close inspection of this passage shows how Jacopo's brush felt its way round and across the *form* and hardly at all along the contours. It is a drawing, but a sculptor's drawing.

What seems to me to turn the *Massacre of the Innocents* from a potential masterpiece into a comparative failure is the refusal of the elaborate stage-setting to contain the actors. It is a spacious scene, constructed on many levels and receding by carefully arranged architectural sequences to an opening high up on the right, and beyond that to a remote vista. Yet it does not suggest space, and for that reason none of the packed incidents takes its place in it convincingly. This is unusual with Tintoretto who rarely failed to create a logical ground plan. All his tricks of composition are there, the planned masses of light and shadow, the alternating bands of light that should, when properly placed, lead the eye from foreground to background, the dark silhouettes that break up the light areas, the gleaming lights that emerge from the dark areas. They remain tricks. Jacopo is using a formula. Admittedly it is a formula of his own invention, but his gift of projecting himself into the three-dimensional framework of the scene, which accounts



for the persuasiveness of the *Last Supper*, the *Nativity* and the *Annunciation*, has here deserted him. The architectural construction within which the crowded tragedy is being enacted, has a manufactured look and the shafts of light seem to fall in the wrong places. The spectator's journey into the picture is jerky and uncertain, and the impact of the tragedy is thereby weakened.

The tragedy itself is visualized with Tintoretto's full power, and the reader will have gathered that in my opinion no other artist has ever rivalled him in the power to visualize an event. To understand anguish at this pitch of intensity is not at all the same thing as to imagine the protective or terrified gestures of the mothers or the actions of the soldiers. There is an *abstraction* of terror in the woman on the left who grasps the soldier's sword in one hand and reaches over her shoulder for her baby with the other; and an *abstraction* of ruthlessness in the swinging torso of the soldier on the right who seizes a child by the ankle.

The painting is almost too full of such purely imaginative feats and one has only to compare it with other artists' attempts to achieve the same effect in order to realize how far Tintoretto was prepared to go in narrative painting. Rubens had the necessary energy, but not the necessary profundity. Rembrandt was incapable of stylizing gesture to the extent that such a theme demands. Michelangelo had not the heart to be so explicit in his account of an actual happening. Signorelli would have lost his grip on the narrative in his attempt to solve the problems of composition. Raphael, with his slower tempo and more measured rhythms, would never have achieved the sense of urgency that informs Tintoretto's picture.

The two nocturnes of the Marys—lonely diminutive figures seated in wide moonlit landscapes—are unique in sixteenth-century art. They are placed in the most unfavourable positions in the room, in the two darkest corners next to windows which dazzle the spectator and make anything but the broadest treatment and the strongest possible contrasts meaningless. They are extreme instances of Tintoretto's practice, noted by Boschini, of studying the pictorial problem on the spot, taking into account the height on the wall, the lighting, and the distance from the eye. The present lighting system is unfair to them, yet one would not wish to see them otherwise for they are revealed as *tours de force* of scene painting,

brutally emphatic in the simplification of their tones, painted at full speed, with the carelessness of a man who can afford to be careless provided he has an important message to communicate.

It is easy to exaggerate the importance of these two panels. They are unique in that they are prophetic. They are a century ahead of their time in their romanticism, their bravura, their new attitude to the relationship between figures and landscape.

From time to time the Renaissance had produced lyrical romantics like Piero di Cosimo and Giorgione who, within the painterly conventions of their own period, had seen man as a diminutive figure dwarfed by the mysterious forces of nature. And Chinese painting had always used this conception as one of its central themes. But Tintoretto, unlike Piero di Cosimo and Giorgione (the Giorgione of the *Tempesta*) did escape from the conventions of his period when he painted these two panels. They are not Chinese in outlook, but they have more than a hint in them of Chinoiserie. They foreshadow a period of European art which found the Chinese point of view sympathetic; therefore they are mainly remarkable because they were painted too soon. Ruskin praises them though rather half-heartedly, because they were painted by Tintoretto. Had they been by followers of Gaspar Poussin or Salvator Rosa, he would have disliked them heartily. And I suspect that our own attitude to them is influenced rather by the fact that they are remarkable for their time than because they are intrinsically excellent. They have the kind of mysteries—the flashing outlines of distant hills, the gleam of moonlight on water, the dark tangled silhouettes of tree-roots by river banks—that became almost commonplaces to a later age. As illustrations to phrases like ‘and leave the world to darkness and to me’ they would be perfect. Such a phrase would have been unthinkable in the fifteen-eighties.

The *Flight into Egypt* (Pl. 41) contains all this romantic sentiment but subordinates it to, or rather fuses it with, the grandest kind of High Renaissance humanism.

The travellers are making their way slowly through one of the loveliest and richest landscapes ever painted, embowered with trees in the foreground, thickly wooded in the middle distance, with patches of sun lying across the faraway hillsides. A farm building,

a cow emerging from the thicket, little figures cutting osiers by the side of a stream, give it a pastoral mood, but also an oddly North European air. It has some of the homeliness of Dutch landscapes and some of the immensity of Turner's middle period and even some of Constable's breezy insistence on the changeable English climate. One wonders to what extent Tintoretto's German and Flemish assistants had a hand in it, for no stretch of Italian countryside ever had quite this domesticated air and this lush softness. Yet it would be absurd to suggest that Tintoretto's Nordic assistants could introduce a mood that was uncongenial to Tintoretto himself. It must be remembered that an artist chooses his assistants and that there must have been something inherently attractive to Jacopo in the 'expressionist' temperament of the artists who were working with him.

A rather weary Joseph leads the donkey on which the Mother and Child are riding, but the group, despite its dominant position in the foreground, is not in the centre of the picture. It is as though Tintoretto, with his usual capacity for arriving in the nick of time, had just managed to catch them before they passed on and out of the picture. Their presence in the foreground (St. Joseph's foot is even cut off by the frame) seems almost a matter of chance.

The *Visitation* (Pl. 43) was Jacopo's last picture for the Scuola. It is a comparatively small canvas (5 ft. 3 in. by 7 ft. 10 in.), but painted with an unusually rich, enamelled surface. One can imagine Jacopo, having come to the end of the task on which he had been employed, at intervals, for half a lifetime, lingering over this farewell picture, reluctant to call it finished until it was as highly wrought as he could make it. It is not for that reason any less broad in design or more detailed in execution than the rest. The 'San Rocco Style,' the dark solemnity that began with the *Crucifixion* twenty years earlier, is even more evident in the *Visitation* of 1587.

The force of the picture depends entirely on its simple silhouettes. In order to achieve them, Tintoretto has dropped the ground-line to within eighteen inches of the base of the picture. That ground-line and the dark-patterned foliage of a tree on the left are all that he will concede by way of an environment. Contrary to his usual practice of elaborately setting his stage before introducing his

actors, the actors, here, are the whole picture. The two women embrace against an expanse of sky almost unbroken by clouds or even by variations of tone. The tempo drops, after the Allegro Furioso of the *Massacre* and the Andante con Moto of the *Flight into Egypt*, to an Adagio. It is the tempo of Raphael, and like Raphael, Tintoretto depends entirely on his *shapes*—not only the positive shapes of the two meeting women and the two men who stand by on either side, but on the *negative* shapes, the areas of sky seen between them and above them. They are as carefully designed as the marvellous shapes in Raphael's Sistine Madonna, but they are very different in character. The two artists were never nearer to each other, and for that very reason, the difference between them was never so apparent. Raphael's shapes flow with an easy, subtle grace. Tintoretto's are angular and insistent. Ruskin in a moment of acute observation noted this piece of pure abstract art. 'The intervals between the figures,' he says, 'look like ravines between great rocks and have all the sublimity of an alpine valley at twilight.' It is the kind of language a modern writer would use in order to explain the power of an unusually difficult picture by Picasso. It could not have been applied to any other painter of the sixteenth century.

Yet despite this fierce angular power, the focal point of the picture, where the women's heads meet, and their white scarves catch the full light against the sky behind, has an indescribable tenderness. Zaccharias and Joseph, who has climbed the hill but is still on a lower level, stand quietly apart, framing in the two women but not interrupting them.

The bowed bodies and inclined heads are an invention of Tintoretto's which was often imitated by Veronese. They appear again and again in Jacopo's work whenever he wishes to combine movement with reverence. Looking at the bowed figure of Zaccharias leaning on his staff or at the forward-thrusting figure of Joseph in the *Flight into Egypt*, or at the Christ of the *Baptism* in the church of San Silvestro in Venice, I have sometimes wondered whether Tintoretto did not pick up this characteristic pose from the gondoliers of Venice as they throw their weight on to one foot and bend forward over their oars. It is, as anyone who has watched a gondolier wind, now, one of the most powerful yet the most gracious movements of which the human body is capable.



## Chapter Twelve

1566-86

ON the day when the Guardian of the Scuola of San Rocco announced the terms of the competition for the central panel of the Albergo ceiling—31st May, 1564—Tintoretto had exactly thirty years to live. Of these years, as we have seen, two and a half—May 1564 to November 1566—were fully occupied with the painting of the Albergo, and, as far as one can gather, nothing that was of importance came from his studio during that period. Then, after a gap of eleven years, he worked continuously on the Upper Hall, from June 1576 to July 1581—surely the most strenuous six years any artist ever spent. Then, after a further gap of two years, he started work on the Lower Hall in July 1583, finished it in August 1587, and completed the altarpiece in the Upper Hall, and probably the *Visitation*, in the following year. During this period he had worked, at intervals, on the pictures for the church of the Saint.

In spite of this programme, a very considerable number of important works still remain to be accounted for. They can be grouped under the following headings: portraits, with which we are not here concerned, pictures for Venetian churches, paintings for the Ducal Palace and the Procuratie (the administrative offices of the Republic which occupied most of the buildings surrounding the Piazza of St. Mark) mosaic cartoons for the Basilica of St. Mark, and miscellaneous commissions—historical or mythological works, many of which, as one would expect, have found their way into collections outside Venice, or into the Venetian Accademia.

In the year following the completion of the Scuola, the Republic decided to entrust the seventy-year-old artist with the painting of the *Paradiso* in the hall of the Grand Council in the Ducal Palace. The canvas—seventy feet long and thirty feet high—might well have been Tintoretto's last work, but he lived long enough not

only to supervise its completion but also to produce three of his most personal pictures, the *Entombment*, in the mortuary of San Giorgio Maggiore, and the *Last Supper* and the *Gathering of Manna* in the sanctuary of the same church. He was working on both pictures in the early months of 1594. Both had been completed when he died on the last day of May.

In view of the extraordinary scarcity of firmly dated pictures during these last years, it will be more convenient to group Tintoretto's later paintings under categories than to attempt a chronological order. This chapter deals with the more important paintings executed between 1566 and 1587, with the exception of those commissioned for the Ducal Palace and the other official buildings of the Venetian Republic, and the cartoons which Tintoretto furnished for the mosaicists of St. Mark's. These latter, since the Basilica was not the Cathedral of Venice but the Doges' private chapel, were paid for out of the Republican treasury.

In the church of San Cassiano, there is a *Resurrection* by Tintoretto, known to have been commissioned in 1562 and completed in 1565. It is in bad condition and has been at least twice restored, and is now of no importance. But on either side of the sanctuary in the same church hang two of Jacopo's most memorable inventions, a *Crucifixion* and a *Descent into Limbo*, both painted in 1568. The portrait of Cristoforo de' Gozzi who commissioned the pictures occurs among the group of contemporary heads in the lower right-hand corner of the *Limbo* picture.

In contrast with the great *Crucifixion* of San Rocco of three years earlier, this seems strangely empty and silent. There, all the activities of a cruel or indifferent world are gathered round the foot of the cross as though by a magnet: here they are removed to a distance. The Virgin and St. John have withdrawn to the edge of the picture, the spectators are in the distance, only their heads visible above the low horizon, behind a fence of spears silhouetted with the utmost sharpness and precision against the pale sky. The sky itself is calm, with bands of level cloud. The only intruders are the two Jews one of whom, on the ground, hands the label, I.N.R.I., to the other, half-way up the ladder, and the Roman banner that fills the triangle between the ladder and the cross. Below it, in a crumpled heap on the ground, lies the seam-

less garment. The crosses are seen from the side and from below. It is one of those pictures, like the *Nativity* of San Rocco, in which the conception is that of a participating spectator, yet, for once, the design is as simple and precise as a Seurat. Verticals and horizontals are its basis and only the diagonal ladder running like a bond between the Virgin and her crucified Son, breaks the solemn, square-cut rhythm.

*Christ's Descent into Limbo* is painted in a very different mood. It is an ominously dark picture, and the darkness is filled with the dim, phosphorescent edges of little rolling clouds bubbling upwards as from some subterranean cauldron. Out of the darkness the figure of Christ emerges, stooping forward with the familiar gondolier's stoop, as He advances through the thick air. Adam and Eve, kneeling in humility before Him, seem like half-incarnate ghosts surrounded by the even more ghostly heads of bearded prophets. Two muscular angels hurl themselves outwards to the edges of the canvas, shattering the massive doors of timber and metal. On the extreme right, portraits of Cristoforo de' Gozzi and two other donors are squeezed inappropriately into a corner, like occupants of the stage box. It is an odd and impressive mixture of Blake-like vision, Baroque mannerisms and Tintorettesque realism.

Drawings for the figures of Adam and Eve have survived, sober, monumental drawings with none of the excited ripple of movement and muscle that Tintoretto used when he was recording an attitude or a gesture for its own sake. These are not the kind of drawings to be added to the studio stock for use when occasion required, but preparatory studies for a picture already visualized. What makes the picture memorable is not the gesture or movement of individual figures but Tintoretto's sense of their scale in relation to the canvas. No doubt every artist solves this problem intuitively and the spectator is usually unaware that there is a problem at all. Watteau's figures are smaller in relation to the area of the canvas than Boucher's because he is more conscious of the need to suggest the space that surrounds them. In the case of Tintoretto's *The Descent into Limbo*, it was necessary to create an impression of figures herded together like prisoners in an immense void, and in consequence they are just a little smaller than one would have expected. They give a queer impression of being confined and yet adrift in space.

The chronologist would gain a certain satisfaction if he could manage to fill the eleven-year gap between the completion of the San Rocco Albergo and the beginning of work on the Upper Hall with a series of specific paintings that could be reasonably ascribed to the late sixties and the early seventies. Certainly there is no evidence of an unproductive period during these years of Jacopo's life. Documents record payments for mosaic cartoons, for portraits, for many paintings done for the Ducal Palace (most of which were destroyed in the fire of 1577 and which will be briefly referred to in the next chapter) for single figures and small panels for the Procuratie. But of major works known to have been painted during those eleven years, few survive.

A *Raising of Lazarus* at Lubeck, on which the inscription 'Jacomo Tintoretto Inventor—A 1576 Venezia' seems to suggest that the design was Jacopo's and the execution left to his assistants—foreshadows the general arrangement of the same subject in the San Rocco series. As at San Rocco, the tomb out of which Lazarus is being lifted is high above the head of Christ. The composition is reversed, but the only part of it which was closely followed in the later picture is the figure of the kneeling woman who gazes at Christ with her arms outspread.

The *Temptation of St. Anthony* (Pl. 44) in the church of Trovaso was almost certainly painted in 1577, since the altar to which it belongs and the frame that contains it were erected by Antonio Milledonne in that year. It is a picture that marks a temporary phase in Tintoretto's production. It is gentle and mild in conception, painted with an elaborate finish and with none of the fire or impatience of the 'San Rocco style'; the three temptresses that beset the not very disturbed Saint are reversions to the Venetian feminine ideal which had hardly occurred in Jacopo's painting since the fifties or the early sixties, but which was to be his main theme in the four allegories in the Ducal Palace painted in the following year.

It is one of his most highly finished pictures but not one of his most successful. The figures have an artificially posed air unusual with Tintoretto, as though they were acting in the interests of a preconceived scheme of composition. But it was Tintoretto's personal weakness—unusual for an artist who had grown up in the Venetian High Renaissance—to be hesitant and a little lacking in



tact when his theme held erotic implications. In mythological narratives like the *Venus and Vulcan* of Vienna he could overstress it: when it was bound up with Christian story and destined for an altarpiece, as here, his understatement almost robs the picture of its meaning. The truth is that, as already noted, he had an unusually unselfconscious attitude to the human body. And being essentially a narrative painter, a specialist in explaining action by means of gesture, those subtle overtones of the texture, the radiance, the inherent sensuous beauty of the human body were usually beyond his power. Titian, Palma, Tiepolo or Boucher could manage with absolute precision to indicate the exact degree of seductiveness necessary for the given subject. For this reason Tintoretto's temptresses fail to convince one that they have any serious designs on the Saint even though they pull off his garments, scatter his rosary, tear the pages of his missal and dangle jewellery before his eyes.

But since it is at this moment that a certain sweetness of expression and elegance of gesture appear in Tintoretto's paintings, it is tempting to guess that four other pictures, the Munich *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*, the National Gallery's *Origin of the Milky Way*, the *Miracle of St. Agnes* in the Madonna dell' Orto, and the *St. Ursula* in the church of San Lazzaro, were painted during these years.

The *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Pl. 45) is probably the latest of this group.<sup>1</sup> It is one of Jacopo's most charming and intimate paintings. Here he was on ground that he understood thoroughly. A quiet but earnest discussion between two women and one man is taking place in a Venetian interior. As usual, the kitchen with its elaborate equipment is in evidence, and in view of the subject, appropriately in evidence: and, as usual, the outside world is seen through the open door. The group of waiting disciples draw the eye through it, taking away the enclosed sense of the interior and making it clear that this is no domestic conversation piece.

Yet Tintoretto never portrayed more subtly the quiet seriousness of human relationships. A description of the painting would read like a description of any carefully observed Dutch domestic interior. Yet nothing could be less Dutch. The *Last Supper* of San Trovaso is open to the charge of being too closely observed with the eye of

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 231.

the still-life painter. Here every hint of the still-life eye has disappeared and nothing remains but what is ultimately and poetically significant. The three persons gesticulate gently but urgently, and their gestures, their eloquent hands, are entirely Italian. Jesus bends towards Mary, 'which also sat at his feet' and his persuasive hands make a crisp arabesque against the brightly lit tablecloth. Martha bends over her sister, her pointing finger illuminated against her dark dress. Mary sits on a low stool, her whole body relaxed, in the attitude of one patiently listening but ready to reply. Lazarus leans on the table with his arms folded, also listening but with no intention of joining in.

These subtle dramatic emphases almost pass unnoticed. One does not expect them from Tintoretto the master of the heroic and the grandiose, and so one is not looking for them. Moreover, the planning of the picture is so suave, the figures so happily disposed that one tends to regard it as a formal composition rather than as a narrative.

Seen as a composition it is unusually successful and quite typical. It is, of course, an example of Tintoretto's own centrifugal system. The three hands form an inner triangle that contains the picture's empty centre, and round them the four figures are disposed in a circle that takes in the full width of the canvas. The plan is remarkably similar to that of the Ducal Palace *Bacchus and Ariadne* (in reverse), yet they are so different in mood that the similarity of plan seems to have escaped notice.

Jacopo signed the picture as he often did in the case of paintings destined to leave Venice. It passed into the Munich collection from the Dominican Church of Augsburg.

The *Origin of the Milky Way* (Pl. 48) in the National Gallery has the same high degree of finish, the same saturation of colour as the other pictures in this group. The picture has been considerably amputated at the base and consequently appears more crowded—and therefore, despite the energy of its movement, more Titianesque—than it did when it was painted. A drawing done from it (not a preparatory study as some have supposed) and rather unconvincingly signed Domenico Tintoretto, shows the original composition with lilies springing from the ground under the fructifying influence of the milk from the Goddess's breasts. It is an illustration of an old Byzantine legend, and the motives of stars and lilies occur

in the arms of Tommaso Rangone, the doctor from Ravenna who had commissioned the series of St. Mark narratives for the Scuola of San Marco. It seems likely that the picture was painted for him. If so, one can be thankful that he did not again insist on the introduction of his portrait. Amputations, such as this picture has suffered (the reader will remember an equally severe one in the case of the *Removal of St. Mark's Body*), are easier in Tintoretto's comparatively loose system of composition than in the more tightly packed designs of his Venetian predecessors.

But what remains is surprisingly self-contained. The essence of the picture is unimpaired. The composition again is centrifugal, but here one's eye, instead of following the circumference of a wheel, is impelled outwards, from the centre, along its spokes. Everything in the picture, including the Goddess's own limbs, radiates from her body to the edges of the canvas. No better instance could be found of form dictated by content. Tietze, noting the 'restlessness and raggedness of the composition,' surely does less than justice to an artist who was always ready to invent a composition to suit his subject-matter. The idea behind the painting is not restlessness and raggedness but explosion and radiation.

As always, when the lyrical was more important than the dramatic element in his painting, Tintoretto has reduced the strength of the shadows on the flesh to a minimum. A suffused golden light plays over the whole of the picture.

The third painting, which I am inclined to link, in time, with these two, is the *Miracle of St. Agnes* (Pl. 47) in the Madonna dell' Orto. An erroneous impression that this picture is mentioned by Vasari, and must, therefore, have been painted before his second visit to Venice in 1566, has been widely accepted by art historians. The fact that Vasari does not mention it (a reference to it was added by his later editor, Milanese) is certainly negative evidence, but he describes the *Presentation of the Virgin* as 'the most carefully executed, the most delicately finished and the most cheerful-looking picture to be found in all the church,' a description which he would hardly have allowed to stand if he had seen the St. Agnes picture at the same time, for it is one of the most delicately finished of Jacopo's altarpieces, and I am tempted for that reason to place it with this group of highly wrought paintings of the middle and

late seventies, which reached its climax in the four Ducal Palace allegories of 1578.

I suspect that the temptation to give it an early date was increased by its superficial resemblance to the *Miracle of the Slave*.<sup>1</sup> There is the same dense crowd, the same prostrate foreground figure and the same interested spectators bending inwards. But the treatment of the crowd is broader, the gestures less energetic, the faces of the women gentler and sweeter. At the period of the *Miracle of the Slave*, Jacopo had not yet developed his system of division into light and dark areas: the two standing figures at the back of the crowd, silhouetted against the pale arcade, or the dark turbaned head in the centre against the two fully lit women behind, would not have been so emphatic if this had been a work of Tintoretto's youth. In addition, the hairdressing of the women behind St. Agnes is typical of the late seventies.

Two more paintings in the idyllic-mythological mood are the *Nine Muses* (Pl. 51) at Hampton Court and the *Concert of Women* in Dresden, both of which were surely designed by Tintoretto. The former may have been partly executed by him, the latter, to judge by reproductions, shows no signs of his personal handwriting. It looks like an inferior school piece or else it has been repainted by a pedestrian hand. Both have the air of an academic exercise painted for clients outside Venice, anxious to obtain a specimen of Venetian opulence rather than an example of Tintoretto's work. Fifteen, or even ten years earlier such pictures would have come from Titian's studio rather than from Tintoretto's. None the less they are magnificently designed. If one can forget the somewhat coarse handling of the paint and the badly decayed surface of the *Nine Muses*, as one does if one looks only at a reproduction, its complex fugal splendour remains. Waves of movement that start on the right-hand side, echo each other concentrically as they swing round the musical instrument that provides a pivot for the whole, and then, splitting and sliding like a cataract, gather themselves together on the left, where two legs meet at the point of a V. It is a triumph in the contrapuntal arrangement of both form and light.

In the Dresden *Concert*, the form is typical of Tintoretto—the empty centre, the figures disposed in a broken oval, the heads everywhere thrust outwards to the edges of the canvas—but the

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 227.



lighting is flat and uninteresting and contradicts the whole of the Tintorettesque conception of the play of light on solid objects.

The fourth painting, the altarpiece of *St. Ursula and the Virgins* (Pl. 46) in the church of San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti in the Ospedale Civile in Venice, is so unconventional in composition that some critics, mistaking its unconventionality for *naïveté*, have assigned as early a date to it as 1545.<sup>1</sup> St. Ursula, accompanied by two bishops, leads a procession of attendant virgins that winds slowly towards the foreground from the river and the ships that have brought them. A single angel, prophetically bearing a martyr's palm, flies overhead.

The picture is unique among Tintoretto's altarpieces for its unhurried serenity, the radiant beauty of the Saint and her virgins who fill the stage as selfconsciously as mannequins at a fashion parade. Indeed, a fashion parade is what in essence the picture is. Tintoretto insists both on the richness of the materials and variety of the dresses and on the superb dignity with which they are worn. There is something positively hypnotic about the slow advance of the maidens, walking two by two, from the remote distance where the ships are anchored towards the foreground. The dating of their dresses is fully discussed in the appendix. But the impetus of the flying angel alone suggests to me a latish date. And it does not seem unlikely that Tintoretto would have painted this homage to radiant girlhood in the seventies when his eldest and favourite daughter was developing from childhood to maturity.

Even later—preferably in the eighties<sup>2</sup>—I would place the six long and narrow pictures of Old Testament subjects in the Prado, already referred to on p. 91, which Velasquez purchased in Venice. They were probably painted as a frieze running round a room. The two longer panels and the four shorter ones evidently fit into some symmetrically arranged scheme and the low viewpoint suggests that they were to be seen from below. In each case the ground-line would come about six inches below the lower edge of the panels and it is possible that at some time they have been cut off at the base to fit them into a new interior. They are painted hurriedly and with an emphasis on decorative glitter unusual with Tintoretto, but remembering Boschini's remark that he 'studied the pictorial problem on the spot' one can be

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix, p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix, p. 228.

quite sure that they were intended for some richly gilded and decorated interior, and the fact that a woman is the heroine in each panel, tempts one to guess at an expensively furnished boudoir.

But concurrently with the group of poetical and lyrical paintings described above, Tintoretto was also painting in the sombre mood of San Rocco. Three pictures now hanging in the sanctuary of the church of San Stefano, all of which were seen by seventeenth-century writers in the church of Santa Margherita, and so were not painted for the rather dark interior in which they are now to be seen, would look stylistically at home in the Upper Hall of the Scuola. The *Last Supper* is the least impressive of the three mainly because one can hardly look at it without being reminded of the *Last Suppers* of San Polo and of the Scuola, both of which have greater pictorial unity and sincerity of feeling. But the two nocturnes, *The Agony in the Garden* (Pl. 33) and *The Washing of the Feet*, do not suffer by comparison with the San Rocco series. The first is darker and even more mysterious than its San Rocco counterpart. The same light shimmers along the edges of the leaves and the mantles of the sleeping disciples: the approaching procession led by Judas is even more shadowy, the figure of Christ has deeper pathos, the angel approaches more gently.

The *Washing of the Feet* is a genuine attempt at tenebrist realism and were it not so full of Tintoretto's dramatic insight, a clever restorer could easily turn it into a plausible Caravaggio. A single torch in the upper right-hand corner is the only source of light, and Tintoretto accepts the exaggerated chiaroscuro that results from this self-imposed limitation. Time has probably darkened the picture, but even when it was painted it must have been a deliberate essay in blackness.

Lastly, among the handful of dated pictures comes the series of eight historical paintings for Guglielmo Duke of Mantua, which provided the occasion for the only journey that Tintoretto is known to have taken away from his native city. It is many years since I saw these paintings in the Munich Alte Pinakothek, and my dim memory of them does little to bring to life the available reproductions in monochrome. I do not propose, therefore, to attempt to describe or evaluate them. That Jacopo is entirely responsible for their design is beyond question, but it seems likely that studio assistants were largely responsible for their execution.

Very little of Tintoretto's characteristic handwriting can be detected in the reproductions. But the correspondence and the negotiations that were occasioned by the commission are worth recording since they shed considerable light on the relations between a busy artist and an exacting patron in the late sixteenth century.

No dynasty of the Italian Renaissance had a more colourful history than the Gonzagas of Mantua, or was more proudly conscious of its own past. Gonzagas had ruled Mantua without a break since 1328. The Gonzaga palace is, after the Vatican, the largest in Italy. The dealings of the Gonzaga Marquises and Dukes with painters, sculptors, medallists and architects had been continuous and enlightened since the beginning of the fifteenth century. Pisanello, Mantegna and Giulio Romano had done some of their best work for the family. The Gonzagas had always been exacting patrons, and when Duke Guglielmo first approached Tintoretto concerning a series of paintings for the palace based on past incidents in the history of the family, he made it clear that the painter would not be allowed a free hand in his interpretation of these "fasti Gonzagheschi."

The correspondence is incomplete, and although one can trace a vigorous spate of instructions to the painter between 1578 and 1580, none of Tintoretto's replies has survived. They may, in fact, never have existed, for, although detailed written instructions were sent from Mantua, they were mainly addressed to the Duke's permanent representative in Venice, a certain Paulo Moro, who then conducted the negotiations with the artist by word of mouth.

In 1550 Guglielmo became Duke of Mantua after the death by drowning at the age of seventeen of his elder brother Francesco, and at once started an ambitious programme of decoration and structural additions to the palace. By the time the new rooms were ready to receive their decorations, it became clear that there were not enough local painters and sculptors to supply the Duke's impatient demands. Guglielmo was particularly fond of sculpture, but finding himself unable to secure enough contemporary work to furnish the new gallery, he commissioned Titian, in 1574, to buy a considerable number of ancient statues from Rome.

Of painters, a few pupils and assistants of Giulio Romano still remained in Mantua, left over from the days when Raphael's



pupil had been painting the walls and ceiling of the Hall of Psyche and the Palazzo del Te.

Eight large historical canvases were required for the new room, and it seems that Tintoretto was first approached by the Duke in 1578, and that the first four paintings were completed in the following year. A detailed description of these paintings, evidently intended for the painter's use, exists in the handwriting of Count Sangiorgio, the Duke's adviser in Mantua in all matters relating to work done in the palace. The subjects running chronologically are: (1) *The Emperor Creating Gianfrancesco Gonzaga first Marquis of Mantua* in the Piazza of San Pietro in 1433; (2) *The Defeat of the Venetians at Panego* by Lodovico, 2nd Marquis, in 1439; (3) *The Relief of Legnago* by Federigo, 3rd Marquis, in 1478; (4) *The Battle on the Taro*, fought by Francesco, 4th Marquis, in 1495. In each case Sangiorgio outlines the historical situation at some length and then briefly describes how the picture could best tell the story. He is particularly careful to indicate the coats of arms and the mottoes to be shown on the banners carried by the troops engaged, and a comparison of the paintings with the written descriptions shows that Tintoretto has conscientiously followed his instructions even though one detects an occasional perversity in the way he has only shown a corner of the carefully described banners. The portraits of the principal characters are painstakingly introduced. Gianfrancesco's is evidently taken from a medal by Pisanello, Lodovico's is reversed from Mantegna's famous fresco in the Camera degli Sposi.

These four pictures were framed and in place in 1579, and it is at this point that the fuller correspondence dealing with the second series of four begins. The quotations given below are slightly abbreviated and compressed, but nothing essential has been omitted. The first letter, dated 1st October, 1579, is from Count Sangiorgio to Paulo Moro, the Duke's representative in Venice. "There are still four pictures to be done, in which Duke Federigo's exploits are to be depicted. The Duke requests me to ask you to approach Tintoretto and find out if he is willing to undertake them. If so, full descriptions will be sent of what is required. You must try to persuade him to do the work and impress upon him the urgency of the matter. The price will be fixed on the same basis as that for the previous four. The pictures must be completed by Christmas."



Even for Tintoretto this time limit—three months for four pictures (roughly seven feet by nine feet) crowded with figures—was manifestly impossible. Moro answered on the 10th of October that Tintoretto was willing to undertake the work, but asked for more time. Sangiorgio's reply, sent by return of post, ignores the request. 'My master, the Duke, is pleased to hear that Tintoretto is willing to paint the four pictures, but wants them by Christmas and asks you to impress upon the painter, in his name, that the affair is urgent. We will discuss the price later, taking any differences of size into account. Herewith I send you a plan of the room with exact measurements. Tell Tintoretto he can start preparing the canvases: while they are drying I will send by express post, a description of the subjects. His Highness requires Tintoretto to send a sketch of the whole so as to avoid the necessity of making the kind of alterations that were necessary in the case of the other four pictures. He must not grudge me this. Persuade him that I am his friend. I only want the work well done.'

Then, on the 20th of October, comes the detailed description of the subjects, drawn up, as were the previous four, in the form of an historical outline and a brief suggestion as to how each picture could be made to tell the story clearly. The following are the four subjects proposed: '(1) How the insignia of "Captain General of the Church" were conferred on Duke Federigo by the Apostolic Legate, in front of an army which fires a salvo of arquebuses and artillery in his honour; (2) how Duke Federigo, after this ceremony, encamped before Parma with Prospero Colonna and the Marquis of Pescara (head of the Imperial Army) and how he captured the part of Parma on the other side of the river. This second picture, therefore, must show the defeated part of the city, its capture by artillery bombardment and the French retreat to that part of the city which is on the far bank of the river. (3) How the same army (the allied forces of the Church and the Emperor) marched against Milan and came upon Lautrec, the French General, and Teodoro Trivulzio, the Venetian General, under the walls of the city in the district of the Porta Romana. During the night, the Marquis of Pescara defeated them and compelled them to retire towards the castle. On this occasion the Marquis Federigo captured Milan, entering the city, with Colonna, by the Porta Ticinese. In the third picture, you may, therefore, show the entry into

Milan, the French in flight which will provide a splendid subject since you can represent a night full of fighting and the fires started by the French in that quarter of the city. (4) After the death of Pope Leo X and the disbanding of the allied army, Duke Federigo remained in Pavia with part of his troops together with Antonio da Leva. Shortly afterwards Lautrec, with Swiss reinforcements, attacked Pavia on two sides but without success. The fourth painting, therefore, is to represent the assault on the city and the retreat of Lautrec.'

The first of these four subjects was not adopted, perhaps because of its similarity to the first of the previous series of four or perhaps in order to make room for an exploit of Guglielmo's predecessor, his brother Duke Francesco. In another letter from Sangiorgio to Moro in early November, instructions are given that the first subject is to be cancelled and that the new subject—the last picture of the series—is to be concerned with Duke Francesco, details to be sent later, together with plans or sketches of Parma, Milan and Pavia and portraits of Federigo and Francesco. At the same time Sangiorgio mentions that the Duke would like Tintoretto to send sketches for a frieze in one of the rooms, consisting of dogs and *putti*, one of whom is to be shown 'holding a clock face as though it were a target.' 'It isn't necessary to have a fully finished sketch of this, provided we get it by return of post.'

Tintoretto presumably received the detailed instructions sent from Mantua on 20th October, about two days later. Some indication of the speed at which he worked can be gathered from the fact that on the 17th November the sketches had been received in Mantua and Sangiorgio comments on them. 'I have seen the sketches. The general effect [l'invention] is good; but the first sketch, marked A, has a fault. The battery which Duke Federigo used in attacking Parma should be on the other side of the river, i.e. on the right-hand side of the picture: so reverse the drawing by oiling it. Also sketch B, where marked with a cross should be introduced into the one marked C, since both events happened at the same time. If this would overcrowd the canvas with too many incidents, omit B altogether and substitute C, following the same procedure as already advised in the case of A. Oil the sketch to make it transparent so as to reverse the composition, because the village in flames should be on the right. Also introduce more

figures near the Duke as it is not proper that he should be alone. Possibly horsemen would take up too much room, so you may represent them on foot as I have roughly indicated in pen and ink. In place of the third picture you can paint the Defence of Pavia which you have forgotten. The last picture showing Duke Francesco is satisfactory. We will send a perspective drawing of the courtyard in question. If there is anything you don't understand please ask for more particulars, but I hardly think this will be necessary.'

The instructions for the last picture must have been sent earlier, though there is no record of them. It represents the visit of Philip II to Mantua in 1549. It cannot have been easy to select a subject to commemorate the exploits of Duke Francesco's uneventful reign between the ages of seven and seventeen.

Evidently Tintoretto reported to Mantua in May 1580 that the paintings were ready, but the Duke's impatience seems to have abated a little. A letter of the 10th of May asks for them to be sent as soon as possible and adds, 'Taking them off their stretchers may make it difficult for you to put them in position. Leave them on their stretchers and send them by boat as they are. While they are in Venice, finish them at your convenience so that you will have no difficulty when you arrive. Packing cases to be paid for by you. We will reimburse you on your arrival.' And in a later letter in the same month: 'Tell Tintoretto that it does not matter: he can wait till after the feast of San Rocco to bring the pictures to Mantua. The frames are being made, but tell him to use the time to advantage in giving these pictures a better finish than the others.'

It will be remembered that in 1580 Tintoretto was fully occupied with the Upper Hall of the Scuola and that he had undertaken to deliver three paintings annually on the 16th of August, the Feast of San Rocco. Probably he wished to be in Venice on that day and had asked for his visit to Mantua to be postponed till later in the year.

By the end of September Tintoretto and his family had arrived in Mantua and the pictures were in place. Sangiorgio, whose tastes evidently lay in the direction of the firm outline and high finish of Giulio Romano, had pestered Jacopo for 'more finish.' He writes on the 29th of September to the Duke's secretary, Zibramonte, 'Tintoretto has now retouched the pictures according to



my instructions. They seem to be turning out all right, taking into account his style, which never finishes anything. He has paid for all materials and, as for the first four he was paid 100 scudi each, I think, if you agree, he could be paid the same for these, subject to adjustment for difference in size.' And finally, on the 3rd of October, 'As soon as the finishing touches are completed, I will pay Tintoretto according to the Duke's instructions.'

I have recorded these negotiations at some length, not because they are unusual but because they provide an example of the spirit in which a more or less routine commission was undertaken in this period. Possibly Sangiorgio was a little more pedantic and fussy than most of Tintoretto's patrons: and Tintoretto's temperament was certainly more fiery and inventive than that of most of his contemporaries, but for that reason he may have been even more adaptable than most of them. Sangiorgio was in the employ of a family that was as proud of its history as it was of its possessions. Duke Guglielmo certainly wished to have eight canvases by Tintoretto, but even more did he desire to possess eight convincing records of the exploits of his ancestors, and Sangiorgio was doing no more than his duty in demanding major alterations in the interest of historical accuracy. There is no reason to think that the vast historical canvases executed for the Ducal Palace in the years immediately following the Mantua commission were painted under less exacting conditions. Tintoretto, on the other hand, seems to complain of nothing but shortage of time; and when one considers that within exactly twelve months of the receipt of the first letter the four big canvases were in position, and that this was, in any case, one of the busiest periods of his life, one can only conclude that the whole conduct of the affair must have seemed extremely satisfactory and normal to both the contracting parties. Even Sangiorgio's reiterated appeals for a higher degree of finish are normal. It is not till sixty or seventy years later that the taste of connoisseurs begins to approve of the breadth of Tintoretto's handling of paint. The first completely enthusiastic commentator on Tintoretto is Boschini who was writing in the middle of the seventeenth century.

The Naples museum contains a rough sketch for the disposition of the main masses of the *Battle on the Taro*, squared for use in the studio. Boschini would certainly have admired its boldness, but



one can be almost certain that Sangiorgio never saw it. It is one of Tintoretto's most daring essays in pictorial shorthand. To the authorities in Mantua it would have been quite unintelligible. That Jacopo should have transferred his design to canvas at so primitive a stage throws a striking sidelight on his studio practice at this period in his career.

## *Chapter Thirteen*

### THE DUCAL PALACE AND MOSAIC CARTOONS

THE Palace of the Doges has occupied its present site between the Basilica of St. Mark and the Riva dei Schiavoni since the ninth century. Of the old Byzantine building that stood there before the fourteenth century nothing remains. It has been replaced partly by the Gothic structure that resembles no other Gothic structure in the world, and partly by later Renaissance additions which are not apparent until one enters the courtyard and finds oneself faced by Antonio Rizzo's staircase. Its external façade is one of the most photographed of man-made things—a vast, smooth, pink-and-white casket, fringed at the top with toy-like decorative battlements, and supported from below on a long, double-storeyed arcade that combines strength and lightness to a degree never achieved before nor since.

It has been rightly described as combining the functions of Buckingham Palace, the Houses of Parliament, 10 Downing Street and the Law Courts, and because of the many purposes it had to serve, the furnishing of its interior presented many difficult problems. For a multitude of reasons Venice had always cultivated a more intense form of civic pride than any other city of Italy. Her isolated position, her mercantile power, her political outlook, in which foreign policy and the machinery of diplomacy played so large a part, and above all, the fact that her government had never identified itself with a ruling family, all tended to make the Palace of the Doges a more complex and a more impressive building than could be found elsewhere in Renaissance Italy. Moreover, out of this Republic, ruled by an unbroken succession of Doges elected from the Venetian aristocracy and bound by a constitution that frowned on any form of hereditary succession, came a remarkable tradition of ritual and pageantry. The Ducal Palace itself was a symbol of the Venetian constitution. The wealth, the power and

the pride of the state were expressed within its walls and within its walls only. No privately owned palace could be allowed to rival it in size and grandeur, as happened at Mantua; no family name was permitted to be more resounding than the name of the highest office in the state, as was the case in Florence. Nowhere in Italy was a title with such massive implications as 'Serenissima' or one which could command so many loyalties. For that reason, nowhere in Italy is there a building into which so many symbols of civic pride have been devotedly poured. A century and a half of sculptors, painters and craftsmen had turned it into a huge treasure-house when the fire of 1574 gutted the Sala del Collegio and the Sala del Senato, on the side of the building overlooking the little canal called Rio di Canonica, and an even more destructive outbreak in 1577 demolished the interiors on the upper floors facing the Riva and the Piazzetta, including the vast halls of the Grand Council and the Sala dello Scrutinio. It was in this second disaster that so many canvases by Gentile and Giovanni Bellini, Alvise Vivarini, Carpaccio, Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto himself were lost.

Tintoretto had already executed several commissions for the Palace, and not quite all of his canvases perished. What remains of work done by him before the two fires is the octagonal ceiling panel of the little Salotto Quadrato, the little vestibule at the top of the 'Golden Staircase' that leads into the Sala delle Quattro Porte, a panel done while Girolamo Priuli was Doge (1559-67) representing the Doge receiving the sword and the scales from a figure of Justice in the presence of his patron saint, St. Gerome, and the ceiling of the Sala degli Inquisitori, consisting of an octagonal panel, the *Parable of the Prodigal Son*, surrounded by four smaller panels of allegorical figures.

As early as 1553 Tintoretto had been given a commission by the Council of Ten to paint a large panel for the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, and a record of a payment on account (100 ducats out of a total of 150) in late December shows that the picture had been finished. Another painting for the same hall was done by him in 1562. One of these two paintings depicted the Coronation of Barbarossa, the other (almost certainly the earlier of the two, though Ridolfi says it was the later picture) his excommunication by Pope Alexander III. Both perished in the fire of 1577, as did

also a huge *Last Judgment* on the wall above the tribunal of the Sala dello Scrutinio. This was replaced, after the fire, by a painting on the same subject by Palma Giovane.

Finally, immediately after the decisive naval victory in which the Venetian and allied fleets defeated the Turks, it was decided to commission a commemorative picture of the battle for the Sala dello Scrutinio. According to Ridolfi's account Titian was the chosen painter, 'but, whatever the reason may have been . . . the decision was reversed, which gave Tintoretto, who was anxious to execute every painting done for the City, an opportunity to obtain the commission.' He goes on to say that since Titian had delayed in starting the work, and as he was in any case bowed down with years, the Senate transferred the commission to Tintoretto. This rather obscure account is hardly clarified by a petition from Tintoretto himself, recorded in the minute books of the Council of Ten and dated the 27th of September 1574 (see Lorenzi, *Monumenti per servire alla storia del Palazzo Ducale*, p. 391), passionately affirming his patriotism and offering, since he had not been privileged to shed his own blood for the republic, to make the government a gift of the picture (which by this time was finished and in position) in return for a promise from them that he or his heirs should receive a 'sensaria'. out of the salt revenues of the Fondaco dei Tedeschi. Six years after Jacopo's death, his widow had occasion to address a long appeal to the government reminding them that the promise had not been fulfilled.

The picture perished in the fire and was later replaced by another of the same subject by Andrea Vicentino, painted presumably just at the moment when Tintoretto was too busy working on the redecorated rooms in other parts of the Palace to renew his attempts to secure the commission. But the story is worth repeating because it offers another instance of Tintoretto's fierce determination to secure a commission at any cost once he had set his heart on it, especially when one of his great contemporaries seemed likely to obtain it.

After the fire of 1577 the reconstruction and redecoration of the damaged rooms, and in particular of the two halls of the Grand Council and of the Scrutinio, were pushed forward with the utmost speed; an army of artists and craftsmen was pressed into urgent service; and Tintoretto's share in the undertaking must have



occupied most of his time between 1578 and 1584. He and his assistants are responsible for the frescoed ceiling in the Sala delle Quattro Porte, the four allegories originally placed in the Salotto Quadrato but now in the Anticollegio, four big votive pictures in the Sala del Collegio, two canvases on the walls of the Sala del Senato, and the great *Triumph of Venice* which forms the central panel of its ceiling, the central rectangle in the ceiling of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, the *Triumph of Doge Nicolo da Ponte*, together with the four adjacent ceiling panels, one of the wall paintings in the same hall, and finally the *Battle of Zara* in the Sala dello Scrutinio. The *Paradise*, which fills the whole end wall of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio was not begun until 1588, four years after the completion of this enormous programme.

It would be possible by calculating the combined areas of all these canvases to prove that no man, unaided, could have covered so many hundred square yards of canvas with paint in the space of six years. Just what share Tintoretto himself had in this mass production of pictures can never be decided. When painting reaches this scale (the area of the central panel in the ceiling of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio alone is 120 square yards), genius no longer counts in the actual application of the paint to the canvas. The personal handwriting of the painter contributes nothing. Painting becomes a mere manual exercise and the relationship between the creative artist and the painter begins to resemble that between architect and bricklayer, where genius is required only in the designing of the panel as a whole, with the addition of detailed drawings of individual figures for enlargement.

Even for Tintoretto, for whom, of all painters, no task was too grandiose, the problem of filling these vast spaces must have seemed almost impossible of solution. The ambitious scale of the refurnished rooms in the Ducal Palace is certainly impressive. One cannot help feeling that the Venetian Government, far from being dismayed by the appalling damage done to the building, was delighted to have an opportunity of evolving an entirely new plan with a new conception of relative proportions. The carved and gilded ceilings of the three largest rooms—the Sala del Senato, the Sala del Maggior Consiglio and the Sala dello Scrutinio—are planned with an admirable sense of unity, but the spaces left for the painter to fill are almost beyond the natural limits of possibility for alle-

gorical or historical painting. The only completely successful attempt to solve the problem is Veronese's oval *Apotheosis of Venice* on the ceiling of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, but it owes its success to Veronese's abandonment of all attempt at drama or dramatic incident—a species of self-denial of which Tintoretto himself was almost incapable. What was needed was decoration, not drama; and though he evidently understood the problem, or at least did not ignore it, he was temperamentally incapable of adopting the detached Veronesean frame of mind that could sacrifice everything to the delectation of the eye.

If Tintoretto's destiny was to paint in the school of San Rocco, Veronese was born for the Ducal Palace. Grandiloquence, suavity, urbanity and superlative taste were the qualities required and Veronese possessed them all. His ceiling in the Sala del Collegio is a masterpiece beside which everything of Tintoretto's in the Ducal Palace, with the exception of the four allegories in the Anticollegio, looks heavy-handed. Playfulness is outside Jacopo's range, and when he tries to be impressive on the subject of Venetian history or the charming Venetian fusion of politics with Christianity, he easily becomes pompous. That combination of seriousness and swagger which Veronese could suggest so tactfully and with such delicate undertones became crude and theatrical when Tintoretto attempted it.

I find myself a little saddened by the spectacle of this creature of gigantic power forced to turn his sincerity into histrionics. I cannot believe in his *Venice Enthroned* in the Senate Hall as I can believe in Veronese's in the Great Council Hall. The gods and nereids of the sea who plunge and disport themselves below her feet are creatures in a ballet whose choreography has got a little out of hand. They are all overplaying their parts; the spectacle of so much energy expended by so many divinities, thirty feet above one's head, is overpowering and restless; and the very size of the stage on which they are performing makes the spectacle a little embarrassing. On a canvas half the size the same performance might have been almost delightful.

But despite Tintoretto's handicap in the Ducal Palace nothing that he did there between 1578 and 1584 can be ignored. The following brief description does not attempt a correct chronological order but takes the paintings in the sequence in which the

visitor to the Palace comes across them if he enters the building by the Scala d'Oro and leaves by the doorway at the far end of the Sala dello Scrutinio.

In the Salotto Quadrato, a small vestibule at the head of the Scala d'Oro, which was given its present form by Doge Girolamo Priuli and escaped both fires, is an octagonal ceiling panel executed during his term of office (1559-67) of *Doge Priuli receiving the sword and scales from the hands of Justice, in the presence of St. Jerome*. The picture is pleasantly designed but not of great importance, and the four bronze-coloured grisailles that surround it are certainly not Tintoretto's.

In the Sala delle Quattro Porte, of which one door leads into the Salotto and the other three into the Anticollegio, the Hall of the Senate and the Hall of the Council of Ten, the whole of the frescoed ceiling is by Jacopo—the only example of fresco by him in the Palace. It is an elaborate stuccoed ceiling with large figures in relief, constructed during the term of office of Alvise Mocenigo (1575-7) and Tintoretto's frescoes were executed during the immediately following years. They consist of a central rectangle (*Jupiter assigning to Venice the command of the Adriatic*), two circular panels on either side (*Juno offering the peacock and the thunderbolt to Venice* and *Venice surrounded by the Virtues*), and eight subsidiary ovals in which single female figures symbolize the cities or districts under Venetian domination.

The frescoes, like most Venetian frescoes, are in bad condition and have been extensively and unskilfully restored. Even in Ridolfi's day they were in bad repair.

In the Sala dell' Anticollegio, a smallish square room used as the antechamber to the Sala del Collegio and richly decorated, after the fire of 1574, after designs by Palladio, now hang the four Allegories of Venice: *The Forge of Vulcan, Mercury and the Three Graces, Bacchus and Ariadne*, and *Minerva protecting Peace and Abundance from Mars* (Pls. 54-57). They were brought into this room from the Salotto Quadrato in 1716 together with Veronese's *Rape of Europa* and Jacopo Bassano's *Return of Jacob*. They were finished in the summer of 1578, and were among the first of Tintoretto's

paintings for the Ducal Palace to be undertaken after the fire of 1574. Paolo Veronese and Palma Giovane, who were appointed to fix a price for them, decided on the 28th of July that Tintoretto should be paid fifty ducats for each canvas.

Painted allegory, to the modern mind, is a clumsy method of expressing a familiar idea by means of a rather inadequate repertory of symbols. But Renaissance Italy took it seriously. Pagan religion provided her with an extensive range of characters specially adapted to symbolize aspects of human endeavour, and nothing could be easier than to represent love by Venus or Cupid, belligerence by Mars, culture by Apollo, art by the Muses, or the exuberance of nature by Bacchus. The literary mind was flattered by such conceits while to the artist nothing could be more welcome, for it gave him the opportunity of escaping from the world into a remote golden age inhabited by perfect, slightly superhuman mortals untroubled by the bustle of history or the deeper emotional levels of Christian religion.

Giovanni Bellini in his old age had made his first full-scale attempt at a golden-age idyll in the *Feast of the Gods*, Giorgione had curiously introduced a contemporary note into it in his *Fête Champêtre*, Titian's *Sacred and Profane Love* and *Bacchus and Ariadne* re-create the same delectable world, the former filled with Giorgionesque languor, the second with his own heroic energy. But after his early phase had passed Titian never quite recaptured the full flavour of the golden-age dream. His later *poesie* are peopled with men and women who for all their magnificence are not quite superhuman or withdrawn. They are mortals. It was left to Tintoretto—the author of the dark narratives of San Rocco—to make the sudden confident step into untroubled Olympian sunshine and reconstruct the golden age at its noblest and blithest. These four pictures seem to sum up everything that the earlier painters of Venetian *poesie* had been striving for, yet they are Tintoretto's own, and one is hard put to it to say precisely what debt Jacopo owed to his predecessors when his mind's creative eye conceived them.

'Taken together,' says Francesco Sansovino in his *Venezia, città nobilissima*, writing a few years after they were painted, 'they symbolize unity.' Vulcan and the Cyclops represent the senators who forge the armour and the weapons which Venice will use in



war. The Three Graces are the high officers of the Republic. One of them leans on a dice, perhaps to counteract the capriciousness of fortune. The other two hold the myrtle and the rose, symbols of perpetual love. Mercury, the wisdom of the Republic, watches over them. Ariadne symbolizes Venice, the Serenissima, seated on the fringe of the sea. Venus crowns her with the starry diadem of liberty, and by uniting her with Bacchus declares her worthy to join the gods. Mars is kept at a safe distance by Minerva, allowing Peace and Abundance to confer together.

Though to us their symbolism is unimportant and ineffective, the spell they weave is irresistible. Whatever has been said of Tintoretto's failure to catch the spirit required by the larger rooms in the Palace does not apply to these breath-taking pictures. It is a curious paradox that Tintoretto, the painter with the biggest imaginative grasp of large-scale design of his generation, should have been comparatively unsuccessful in the Hall of the Grand Council and yet should have been able, in these four relatively small canvases, to urge his lyrical genius to heights it had never reached before and would never reach again. Three of the four give one a strange sense of inevitableness, as though they had been waiting since the beginning of time for the man who would one day paint them: and as though Titian himself had stayed his hand, knowing that even he, at the height of his power, dared not anticipate the marvellous moment of inspiration in which Tintoretto was permitted to conceive them. Everything that the sensuous side of Venetian painting had stood for—the sharp glow of the later Giovanni Bellini, the softer glow of Titian, the languid dream of Giorgione, the opulence of Palma—all these qualities seem to have been distilled into a final unanswerable statement. Because they are adorable they are hackneyed, yet neither in their presence nor in reproduction, however inadequate, does the eye tire of them.

It is not difficult to analyse them as compositions, for they are typical, in one sense, of Tintoretto's systems of composition. But having analysed them, as though they were essays in the harmony of curve with curve and colour with colour, what has been achieved? When one has pointed out that in them certain principles have been successfully applied, the secret of their magic is still unexplained. Other pictures have used those same principles, and used them well, yet they have none of this inevitability.

What strikes one at once is that though the figures are constructed with Tintoretto's usual swinging rhythms, their placing within the rectangle of the canvases is Titianesque. They fill the foreground and they are more tightly packed within the frame than is usual with Tintoretto. They could not, in fact, stand upright without colliding with the upper edge of the frame. They do not move freely in space, and even in depth the familiar easy passage from foreground to middle distance and from middle distance to the horizon is lacking. They are reversions to the old system of a foreground tableau arranged in front of a backcloth. Only in the Vulcan picture—and even there, only to a limited extent—are the figures arranged in depth so as to *occupy* the space provided for them.

Yet despite this classic, Titianesque conception, each one of them is in essence baroque. The gentle gesture by which Minerva repulses Mars is a slanting thrust *away*, as well as to the right. The four figures are arranged on a plane that moves into the picture. So are the Three Graces, and so is the Bacchus and Ariadne group. Venus circles through the air like a comet, but an *approaching* comet. The Graces are not merely a lovely essay in diagonals stretched across the picture plane. Their limbs move towards and away from the spectator—not restlessly but with a gentle controlled grace to which no parallel can be found in Titian.

In each of them Tintoretto has discovered the exactly appropriate composition. Minerva, in the centre, pushes the protagonists apart like the two limbs of a letter V. The Cyclops group themselves in a circle facing inwards round the anvil and their arms swing with the rhythm of a string quartette. (Critics have noted the derivation of the central figure from a kneeling figure in one of Signorelli's Orvieto frescoes. The pose is certainly similar but its similarity is unimportant. Tintoretto, who had drawn hundreds of male figures in action from the life, had no need to borrow from Signorelli.) The two outer Graces bend inwards, forming a pair of human brackets to enclose the central figure. The *Bacchus and Ariadne* is at once the most inventive and the most typically Tintorettesque of them all.

Like the *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Pl. 45) it is a picture of three hands enclosed in a circle (see p. 168), but charming as the *Martha and Mary* picture is, with its atmosphere of the intimate

*genre*, this is even more moving. The three hands are drawn together with infinite tenderness as by an invisible magnet, and are seen against the cool unbroken surface of the sea below, and the circle, instead of merely enclosing them, swings slowly round them. The god, the goddess and the mortal seem to pursue their untroubled orbits in interstellar space, impelled to circle for ever round those expressive all-but-joined hands. As one looks at the picture it seems to revolve, counter-clockwise. But because the balance between the centripetal arms and the centrifugal bodies is so perfect, the movement is soothing—hypnotic rather than disturbing.

Not only these baroque elements in design but also Tintoretto's attitude to the human body differentiate these paintings from any of Titian's *poesie*. I have already tried to define this specifically Tintorettesque attitude in an earlier chapter (see pp. 78 ff). In no other painting by Jacopo is it more apparent than here. These magnificent creatures are utterly unconscious of their own magnificence. The veiled eroticism of which Tintoretto was incapable and which would have stood him in good stead in the *Temptation of St. Anthony* painted in the previous year would be quite inappropriate here. Had Titian conceived these pictures it would have intruded itself and struck a jarring note. But Tintoretto's *Graces*, his *Ariadne* and his *Venus* of 1578 are as free from it as were his *Adam* and *Eve* painted for the Scuola della Trinità twenty-five years earlier. Their bodies belong to the wind and the sun. Behind their easy ample gestures is an immense reserve of athletic power. Of all idealized conceptions of the human body in the long history of painting these are among the most conventionally beautiful, yet they are among the least voluptuous. These goddesses could never be at ease in the boudoir in which Titian's *Venus of Urbino* stretches her contented limbs and demands our mortal admiration.

One last note on these masterpieces. Tintoretto's control of light and shadow is evident in all his paintings, though it is sometimes uncomfortably emphatic, but it was never so complete as here. The light lies across these gleaming bodies—especially in the *Three Graces*—in surprising patterns. The central figure in the *Three Graces* is sliced in daring diagonals that cut across the main diagonal; the splashes of light fall in curious patches that always unite the picture instead, as one would have expected, of dismembering it.



History records certain conversations that one would like to have overheard. One of them is the discussion between Paolo Veronese and Palma Giovane on the 28th of July, 1578, when they came to the conclusion that the four allegories of the Anticollegio were worth the equivalent in to-day's currency of £150 apiece. And when one looks away from these four paintings to Veronese's *Rape of Europa* on the side wall, one realizes how incapable Veronese was of escaping from his own world of urbanity and stylishness into the timeless golden age of Tintoretto. Veronese's picture is seen as a stage performance. Europa and her attendants are highly accomplished actresses. In its fastidiousness, the picture seems to look forward to the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising to find Tiepolo copying it, for the seeds of eighteenth-century playfulness are beginning to appear in Veronese. As Europa seats herself on the extremely civilized bull, her chief care is to handle her fluttering dress with dignity and to expose her bosom provocatively. Veronese, for once, looks shallow—which he is not—and only the contrast with genius at its highest moment of inspiration could have made him so.

In the adjoining Sala del Collegio the situation is reversed. It is Veronese's turn to expose Tintoretto's limitations and to make him look clumsy, and even a little insincere. Veronese's ceiling panels and the great canvas behind the throne together form one of the most complete expressions of his delectable art. The rest of the wall paintings are products of the Tintoretto studio between the years 1581 and 1584. They are votive pictures and their subjects are similar to those which had been destroyed in the fire of 1574. They are four in number and of enormous size, filling the whole wall between the top of the dado and the frieze. Indeed, here and elsewhere in the Palace, paintings are used on the walls where an earlier century, less obsessed with the painterly problems of space and light, would have more sensibly used tapestry. It is, in fact, largely because Veronese's system of colour and composition is nearer to that of tapestry that his Ducal Palace wall paintings are so much more satisfactory than those of any of his contemporaries.

The first of Tintoretto's four paintings, on the right-hand wall, is the Mystical Marriage of St. Catharine in the presence of the kneeling *Doge Francesco Donato*. Prudence, Temperance, Elo-



quence and Charity are in attendance. In the second, *Doge Nicolò da Ponte* kneels before the Virgin. In the third, *Doge Alvise Mocenigo* kneels before the Redeemer in thanksgiving for the delivery of Venice from the plague. Over the entrance door *Doge Andrea Gritti* kneels before the Virgin—a composition based on the destroyed Titian of the same subject, but, as can be seen by comparing it with a surviving woodcut of Titian's version, vastly elaborated and encumbered with *putti*, additional figures, architecture, clouds and draperies. In each of these votive paintings the Doge is accompanied by his patron saint and is presented to the Virgin or to Christ by St. Mark, and one cannot help feeling that the kneeling Doges intrude in much the same way as Tommaso Rangone into the earlier paintings for the Scuola of San Marco, and that the Venetian habit of insisting that the highest officers of the Republic were on intimate terms with the hierarchy of heaven set an almost impossible task for painters. Tintoretto's Doges kneel stiffly and nervously, looking a little bewildered amid the gracious throng of celestial personages. One has an absurd sense of an awkward social situation that no amount of rolling clouds, flying *putti*, stately architecture and fringed curtains will resolve, though Veronese, with his more decorative and detached frame of mind, comes nearer to solving it than Tintoretto.

The best of these four votive pictures is the Mystical Marriage of St. Catharine, mainly because the group on the left is self-contained. Though probably not entirely painted by Jacopo himself, it is one of his most gracious inventions. The poise of St. Catharine herself is unforgettable.

The Sala del Senato was redecorated, like the adjoining rooms in this wing of the Palace, under the oversight of Antonio da Ponte. The room, with its showy, carved and gilded ceiling, designed by Cristoforo Sorte of Verona, was not ready to receive the ceiling panels until 1581. Most of them, certainly those for which Tintoretto was responsible, were in position by 1584.

Of the wall paintings, which run almost continuously round the Hall, the Tintoretto workshop is responsible for two. One is a huge *Dead Christ* adored by Doges Pietro Lando on the left and Marcantonio Trevisan on the right, in which the ceremonial effect produced by the kneeling Doges and their attendant patron saints

and the heavy fringed curtains draped over their heads contradicts, the genuine pathos of the central figure with its encircling angels. The other is a votive figure of Doge Pietro Loredan in prayer before the Virgin.

The central ceiling panel (Pl. 62) is a brave but on the whole unsuccessful attempt to depict Venice enthroned as Queen of the Adriatic surrounded by a restless crowd of gods and allegorical figures. Its lower portion is filled with soaring or plunging minor deities and creatures of the sea, while in the background a corner of an immense globe symbolizes the ocean. Tintoretto's courage in conceiving such a design is evident, but though full of exciting detail and single figures whose wild abandon Rubens himself might have envied, it slips too easily into bathos. The enthroned Venice and her attendant gods lolling on clouds are mere quotations from the professional allegorist's repertory of formulae, nor are they improved by the heavy hand of a later restorer.

On the ceiling of the Sala degli Inquisitori di Stato the panels, originally painted by Tintoretto for this room but removed to the Accademia after the fall of the Republic, have now been replaced. They consist of four allegorical figures of *Faith*, *Justice*, *Strength* and *Charity* surrounding an octagonal panel of the *Return of the Prodigal Son*. They were probably painted about 1560 in one of his less serious moods and with a cheerful Veronesean scheme of colour. There is a spirited sketch for the principal figures in the Uffizi.

The Sala del Maggior Consiglio occupies the whole of the upper part of the Palace overlooking the Riva dei Schiavoni. By far the largest single room in the Palace, it is 166 feet long, 77 feet wide and 46 feet high. At a full meeting of the Grand Council as many as 1,500 persons might be assembled in it. Not counting Tintoretto's *Paradiso*, which occupies the whole of the wall above the Tribunal, the walls are furnished with twenty-one large historical paintings, of which one only, *The Venetian Ambassadors before Frederick Barbarossa*, on (the courtyard side) is from the Tintoretto workshop. Above these paintings runs a frieze of Doges' portraits executed under Tintoretto's supervision. The ceiling (another of Cristoforo Sorte's imposing designs) contains fifteen panels of various sizes for five of which, the central panel

and the four surrounding panels, Tintoretto's workshop was responsible.

If the task of painting allegory on a large scale in the Sala dello Scrutinio was beyond Tintoretto's powers, still more insoluble was the problem of an even larger canvas, 50 feet long and 27 feet wide, on a historical theme, *Doge Nicolò da Ponte offering to Venice the Homage of the Subject Cities*, in the centre of the ceiling. This gargantuan canvas could hardly help being a failure. Human events do not happen on this scale. One is reminded of Aesop's frog attempting to inflate himself to the size of a bull. And the impression is increased by contrast with Veronese's radiant and formalized *Apotheosis of Venice* in the next compartment of the ceiling.

The four battle-pieces that surround this centrepiece are more successful—*The Defence of Brescia*, *The Defeat of Duke Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan*, *The Defeat of Ercole Duke of Ferrara* and *The Capture of Gallipoli*—but in an ensemble designed on this scale, fifty feet above the spectator's head, they can hardly be regarded as paintings in their own right. They are incidents in a huge decorative scheme.

Tintoretto's contributions to the Sala del Maggior Consiglio were executed between 1578 and 1585.

The redecoration of the Sala dello Scrutinio was carried out during the same period as that of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, but the subjects of the wall paintings, with the exception of Palma Giovane's *Last Judgment*, are mostly drawn from Venetian naval engagements. The one painting by Tintoretto, *The Battle of Zara* (Pl. 60), hangs on the courtyard side of the Hall, balancing the picture of the *Battle of Lepanto* with which Vincentino replaced the lost painting Jacopo had made of the same subject in 1574.

This, Tintoretto's last painting in the Palace before he started work on the *Paradiso*, can be dated between 1584 and 1587. In spite of its huge size, its violent action, and the uncountable number of figures it contains, it is a magnificent design, tumultuous yet intelligible. It is a compromise between a tactician's map and an eyewitness's account of a battle. Behind a tangled foreground of besieging soldiers with ladders, dominated by a standard-bearer whose raised flag almost splits the picture vertically in two, rank

upon rank of advancing archers cut diagonally across the middle distance. Showers of arrows infest the air. In the distance, in deliberately falsified perspective, lies the fleet with banks of dark smoke from the artillery fire hanging overhead. Between the fleet and the advancing archers is a plain filled with field-guns and squadrons of cavalry.

Hundreds of drawings of individual archers, of which at least five are extant, must have been made for this extraordinary work, which is more like a chapter torn out of Gibbon or *War and Peace* than a painting in the usually accepted sense. One realizes, as the eye loses itself in the ordered welter of detail, that to-day Hollywood has taken over this heavy burden from the painter, that on the whole, the painter could well afford to transfer it, and that even at the height of an era of grandiose historical painting only the pride of the Venetian Republic could have imposed such a task on an artist.

The covering with mosaic of the upper walls, barrel vaults and domes of the interior of the Basilica of St. Mark was begun in the eleventh century. Less than half of the vast and consistent iconographical scheme had been completed when the rising tides, first of Humanism, then of the Renaissance proper, rendered the medium of mosaic obsolete as a means of expressing a contemporary attitude of mind, and presented the artists of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries with a choice between producing unconvincing pastiches in an archaistic style and attempting to force the medium to perform stylistic feats of which, by its very nature, it was incapable. To-day we should doubtless choose the first alternative. The late Renaissance was too confident of its own greatness and too insensitive to the limitations of the medium to make any such attempt. In any case, the work had to proceed. More abhorrent than a series of insincere pastiches or of stylistic blunders was the idea of an unfinished interior, especially when that interior depended on elaboration of design seen against the sparkle of gold.

To our eyes the sixteenth-century mosaics in St. Mark's are a stylistic blunder of the first magnitude. But they are inevitable. Sixteenth-century imitations of Byzantine designs would have been worse. Bare brick walls would have been worse still. There is no need to pause for long over the mosaics for which Tintoretto was



responsible in St. Mark's. Like all the other leading artists of his time in Venice, he was required to make working cartoons which were then carried out by the trained craftsmen of the period with a good deal of technical competence. None of the cartoons has survived. Probably they would be automatically destroyed in the process of making the mosaic. But there is no reason to suppose that they differed greatly from the mosaics themselves in general appearance. Tintoretto must at least have known that the available range of colours and the nature of the medium itself would not allow him to explore the possibilities of space or to mass his lights and shadows in his usual way. He must have forced himself to adopt a, for him, linear style, relying mainly on expressive attitudes and dynamic drawing, both of which were bound to become coarse and clumsy in the process of translation into the slower tempo of a stubborn medium. His designs are easily distinguishable from those of his contemporaries by the greater breadth of their composition and the elasticity and inventiveness of the individual figures. But no artist of the sixteenth century had more to lose in a translation of this kind than Tintoretto. Mosaic was a medium quite incapable of expressing what he had to say; and he in turn was equally incapable of adapting himself to the genius of the medium.

A good deal is known about his work in supplying the mosaicists of St. Mark's with cartoons. More remains to be discovered. But our interest in these questions must be that of the archaeologist. The considerable amount of work he did over a long period of years adds nothing to his fame and little to our knowledge of his working methods.

The first mention of his name in connection with the St. Mark's mosaics is in May 1563, when, together with Titian and Sansovino, he was called as a witness in a charge brought against the mosaicists for using paint instead of solid tesserae—a significant enough incident, since it proves that even to the skilled craftsmen the mosaic medium was fundamentally unsympathetic. Later in the same year he served on a small committee together with Veronese and Sansovino to choose craftsmen for future work in the Basilica.

On the 9th of December 1568, the first payment is recorded for two cartoons—a *Last Supper* and a *Marriage at Cana*. Between that date and June 1592—two years before his death—no less than fifteen payments are recorded, some for unspecified subjects, others

for a *Paradise* (Pl. 61) which was completed slowly and in several stages between 1577 and 1579, a set of six 'Stories of Susanna' done in 1576 in collaboration with Palma Giovane, and single figure of saints, prophets and angels. Between 1587 and 1592 seems to have been the most crowded period for mosaic cartoons, from which one gathers either that Jacopo became more popular as a mosaic designer in the later period of his life or that other artists became more reluctant to supply cartoons. It is interesting to note that the prices paid to him for cartoons rise steadily during the later years.

The named craftsmen who carried out these designs vary considerably in skill. A detailed examination of their work would be inappropriate here. It belongs rather to the history of the craft of mosaic. The artists who produced the cartoons can hardly have felt satisfied with the results when they compared them with the far greater flexibility of oil paint, but considerable ingenuity was lavished on the thankless task of forcing mosaic into channels in which it was never intended to run. Bartolomeo Bozza, who was responsible for the execution of the *Paradise*, is by far the most skilful of these craftsmen in producing a 'painterly' effect in the least painterly of media.

## Chapter Fourteen

### THE *PARADISO* AND LAST PAINTINGS

BEFORE the fire of 1577, the throne wall of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio was filled with a great fresco of *Paradise* by Guariento, commenced in 1365, remains of which have been preserved in the Palace. It is known that in 1579 a competition was held for the redecoration of this wall. Four elaborate oil sketches exist which are obviously connected with the proposed new painting, but their precise relationship with the competition and with the *Paradiso* eventually painted for the wall by Tintoretto is difficult to establish. One by Palma Giovane is now in the Contini Collection in Florence, one by Francesco Bassano is in the Hermitage at Leningrad, one by Veronese is in the Lille Museum, Tintoretto's is in the Louvre. There is another closely related sketch in Madrid, but authorities disagree whether it is another preliminary sketch by Tintoretto himself or a later painting by another hand, derived from the original in the Ducal Palace. Having seen neither the sketch itself nor a reasonably good reproduction of it I can give no opinion. But close though the Prado sketch is to the Ducal Palace *Paradiso*, every divergence from it discernible in available reproductions suggests a fairly careful copy by an unimaginative artist. The gaps made by the door-frames in the Palace have been filled in with groups of angels not only unworthy of Tintoretto but quite different in style. A diminutive and weakly conceived figure of the Almighty has been introduced between and above Christ and the Virgin Mary. Slight shifts of emphasis, such as an unintelligent copyist would make without realizing their significance rob the sketch of much of its unity. And a meaningless portrait head introduced into the right-hand lower corner—possibly a self-portrait of the painter—is the kind of whimsy that Tintoretto would never have indulged in.

‘Finally,’ writes Ridolfi, ‘agreement was reached that the task

should be entrusted to Paolo Veronese and Francesco Bassano. As, however, their styles did not harmonize and as Veronese died soon afterwards, the work was not begun, so that a new decision had to be reached.' Ridolfi mentions Tintoretto's usual strenuous efforts to secure the commission and his eventual success, saying that he made many designs and finally decided on the arrangement as we now see it, though he altered it in parts, 'for it is difficult for a fertile imagination to be satisfied with a first idea.'

Ridolfi does not say on what terms Bassano and Veronese were to collaborate, nor why, if their styles were considered incompatible, they should have been asked to do so.

A comparison of the preliminary sketches by the four contemporaries is interesting. Those by Veronese and Tintoretto are in simple rectangles, roughly of the same proportions as the wall of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio. Bassano's and Palma's both show how the side doors and the council seats cut into the rectangular shape. Veronese's is an elaborate design, crowded with figures in receding tiers, giving the effect of immense distance at the top. Bassano has arranged his figures in a series of bands radiating inwards towards the centre. Palma's design is more conventional, with a huge single festoon of figures stretching across and a Christ in Glory above and in the centre. Tintoretto's is bolder (Pl. 63). Concentric circles, composed of the Blessed seated on clouds, radiate downwards from a distant central Coronation of the Virgin. The whole conception is evidently based on the Dantesque scheme of concentric spheres enfolding each other until, beyond the ninth sphere, the *primum mobile*, the Empyrean appears in the form of a vast rose. This is not the design that Tintoretto eventually followed, nor could it have been planned as a final solution, since the important figures that occupy the bottom corners of the Louvre sketch would have been obliterated by the door-frames which cut away more than a third of the height at each side.

The difference between the sketch and the finished work is not a question of detail but of two utterly different conceptions. The Louvre sketch is an organization of concentric circles seen in perspective that progresses, in Tintoretto's usual manner, from foreground to background. The finished painting is, as it were, a colossal three-dimensional wall-paper, a vast *pattern* representing space itself, marked out in dark patches, between which one's eye



seems to penetrate into a radiant, crowded infinity, as though innumerable groups and clusters of figures had arranged themselves like galactic systems one behind the other in the interstellar void.

At first glance this absence of formalized planes and, in particular, the lack of a base with a firmly established foreground, confuse and bewilder the eye, but gradually the brave pattern, with the noble silhouettes of Christ and the Virgin as its climax, asserts itself. One begins to see it as the only possible solution to the problem. An enlargement of the Louvre sketch would have made an uncomfortable hole in the wall, would, in fact, have had the effect of removing the wall altogether and of replacing it with an immense vision of a densely peopled firmament governed by the normal laws of perspective, in which the nearer figures would become so impossibly large as to dwarf even the noble proportions of the Sala del Maggior Consiglio.

The finished painting (Pl. 64) is still a vision but it is governed by none of the normal optical laws.<sup>1</sup> The effect is not of standing in this world and gazing into the remote distances of the next but of seeing through a glass wall into a celestial aquarium in which both light and distance means nothing. Single figures and groups of figures float through this supernatural ether, towards or away from the glass wall, in a ceaseless rhythmic movement, not under the spell of gravity but in obedience to the magnetism that radiates from Christ and the Virgin who bend gently towards each other above them. The gaps between them are not areas of radiance but glimpses of interstellar space, and that space is not so much *occupied* by the myriads of the blessed as *composed of* them. The radiance in which they have their being has become interchangeable with their being itself. The world of visual experience with its vocabulary of 'near,' 'far,' 'upper,' 'lower,' 'towards,' 'away from,' no longer exists. This, in purely practical terms, gives Tintoretto the immense advantage of being able to enlarge or diminish any figure at will without contradicting the laws of perspective; it retains the medieval system of scale by importance without abandoning the Renaissance system of scale by distance.

<sup>1</sup> Immediately after writing this sentence I came across Dante's

Chè dove Dio senza mezzo governa  
Le legge natural nulla rileva

in Canto 30 of the *Paradiso*.

With the normal world of perspective has vanished the normal world of colour. The *Paradiso* has its own scheme of colour ranging from dark masses of indigo and garnet mingled with crimson, to pale cold blue and paler pink threaded with a golden light that bursts from the head of Christ and spreads outwards and downwards, diminishing as it recedes from the point of origin, but echoed here and there in the draperies.

The result of this pervading rhythm of pattern and colour is that the painting can no longer be 'read' as one reads a normal picture. It is not a 'scene' with intelligible spatial connections between its various parts. Yet the connections are there. The groups are related to each other by magnetic lines of force as iron filings arrange themselves at the bidding of a magnet. Only one other painting by Tintoretto has been envisaged in this way—the *Last Judgment* of the Madonna dell' Orto—and that, for all its grandeur, lacks the controlling rhythms of the *Paradiso*.

It would be tedious to describe in detail the placing of the hierarchies and of the saints in the canvas, but the general arrangement and the differences of emphasis which determine the relative importance of the figures are worth mentioning briefly.

The two central figures, though comparatively small in scale, rise out of a dark compact mass of cherubs, and dominate the whole canvas, partly by virtue of the radiance that emanates from behind them and partly by the sheer weight of their silhouettes. Towards them the archangels Gabriel and Michael, supported by orderly cohorts of Cherubim, Seraphim, Thrones, Dominations and Principalities, fly inwards. The whole of this celestial army forms an upper festoon. Below, an inexplicable winged creature with an aureole soars upwards (Ruskin identifies him as 'the Angel of the Sea,' the guardian angel of the Serenissima), on either side of whom, again supported on a solid bed of Cherubim, recline the four Evangelists, the angular shapes of their great books catching the light. They form the centre of a lower festoon in the left arm of which Moses and the kings of the Old Testament are easily distinguished, balanced on the right by St. Paul and the doctors of the Latin Church—Jerome, Ambrose, Gregory and Augustine. Adam and Eve form a detached group below St. John, and above them is a group of the disciples culminating in an energetically drawn St. Peter. In the extreme right-hand corner is the Magdalen, sup-

ported by four angels; balancing her on the left, St. Anthony of Padua, St. Francis and a crowd of female saints and martyrs. St. George occupies the angle of the left-hand door, balanced on the right by St. Christopher. A third, smaller festoon of angels forms a crescent above the Doge's throne. There is every evidence that Tintoretto considered carefully the placing of the scores of identifiable figures and their relative importances. But one cannot 'read' his picture by means of the kind of 'key' so often supplied with groups of distinguished Victorians. His system of composition is too dynamic for the eye to travel inquiringly from one personage to another. One examines the picture as one examines a crowd in motion, recognizing a familiar face here and there, losing it again, feeling certain that sooner or later, in that dense throng, one will be brought face to face with the personage one is looking for.

The length of the *Paradiso* is just under 80 feet, its average height 23 feet. It was painted in sections in the old Scuola della Misericordia, placed in position half-finished, and completed on the spot some time after 1588. Bardi, in his description of the Ducal Palace published in 1587, attributes the *Paradiso* to Veronese and Bassano, having doubtless heard of the Republic's decision to entrust the work to them. Veronese died in April 1588, and even if Tintoretto started on the *Paradiso* immediately, it is unlikely that the various portions of the canvas could have been placed in position and sewn together in the Sala del Maggior Consiglio till the winter of the following year.

Ridolfi says that the Signori, delighted with the work, asked Tintoretto to name his price. He refused. They offered a generous fee. He declined to accept the sum offered, 'wishing perhaps to capture their affections by this means.' He adds: 'It appears that after the labours of the *Paradiso* his fury for work slackened, and he gave himself to the contemplation of heavenly things. . . . He spent much time in pious meditation in the Madonna dell' Orto, in conversation with the Fathers.'

For an old man resting after a lifetime of incessant labour, the paintings of the last five years are surprising. The last pictures for the Scuola of San Rocco—the altarpiece and the *Visitation*—had only been completed in 1588. Of the paintings definitely known



to have been done in the 'nineties there are three masterpieces—*The Last Supper*, *The Gathering of Manna* and the *Entombment* in San Giorgio Maggiore. Two paintings in the church of the Redentore on the Giudecca were executed between 1592 and 1594, but are manifestly workshop pictures. Between the *Paradiso* and this last group one can place with some certainty the six pictures of the St. Catherine legend painted for the church of Sta Caterina.

This strange series of comparatively small pictures contains some of Tintoretto's best and worst passages of painting and shows his dramatic imagination at its fiercest and its feeblest. It is difficult to imagine that any of his assistants could have had a hand in the *Capture of St. Catherine* (Pl. 67) or the *St. Catherine and the Wheels* (Pl. 68), so confident and passionate is every stroke of the brush. It is equally difficult to think that he could have done more than casually sketch out the designs of the *Disputation with the Emperor Maxentius* and the *Disputation with the Alexandrian Doctors*, or that, having entrusted the painting of them to his assistants, he could have allowed them to take their places in a church which already possessed, as its altarpiece, one of Veronese's most enchanting compositions. Admittedly both of these school pictures are in bad condition, but even when they were painted they could never have been worthy of Jacopo's studio. The remaining two, *The Empress Visiting St. Catherine in Prison* and *The Flagellation of St. Catherine*, are impressive and the gestures of individual figures are magnificent, but they contain passages of tired and clumsy paint that suggest neither a master mind that has lost its vigour—like the last paintings of Renoir—nor the efforts of a disciple to forge the master's handwriting. One can only imagine that Tintoretto carried through the *Capture* and the *Wheels* with his own unaided hand, designed and supervised the painting of the two prison scenes, and then lost interest, giving himself over to "the contemplation of heavenly things."

Nothing could be more vigorous than the *Capture*. The saint's limbs, sketched in line with a full brush, from a male figure, can easily be seen as a pentimento under her richly brocaded dress. The grass and undergrowth on the little mound on which she stands are painted with the same swift confidence. So is the group in the middle distance. Sky, earth and figures form a single unit of pattern. On this comparatively small scale one can follow Tinto-



retto's hand and eye at work. One can see how, as his hand evolved each separate portion of the design, his eye held the whole spread of the canvas in its grasp, so that no portion of the composition is unrelated to the whole. The captor who bends over to tie the rope spreads his arms out like a bent bow, the axis of the saint's body echoes the curve, the ring of clouds and cherubs in the sky produce a further echo. Casual and spontaneous as the whole composition seems to be, the lines of force that govern it are as closely interwoven as the girders of a bridge.

Every great artist has this power—it is almost the final test of greatness—to relate the part to the whole, but to no great artist does it seem to have come so easily as to Tintoretto. It is almost as though he possessed two pairs of eyes, one to supervise the process of building, the other to fit each portion of it into the blue-print in his mind. When he failed it was for one of two reasons. Either the blue-print overwhelms the picture and becomes so important that the separate portions of it no longer hold their own; in his anxiety to establish the architectural mass the details are not so much omitted as stated so casually as to be tedious. Or else the blue-print itself is inadequate: the controlling pattern is not strong enough or intelligible enough to give the component parts the framework they deserve.

All but two of the St. Catherine series suffer in varying degrees from the latter defect. The architectural mind behind the picture has lost its power to spur the painter's hand. But the *Capture of St. Catherine* and the *Wheels* are among his most daring conceptions. The latter is a deliberately designed melodrama of the most violent kind. A moment of panic-stricken destruction has been forced to the highest possible pitch of excitement. The naked saint, reeling backwards in a blaze of diagonal light, the angel descending headlong from an upper corner, a horseman disappearing in the opposite corner at full gallop, form a disintegrating triangle that balances unsteadily on its apex. The rest of the canvas is filled with the shattered remnants of three vast wheels whose spokes reach crazily across it in all directions in a pattern that seems to symbolize chaos itself. From a purely descriptive point of view, nothing could be more effective than the juxtaposition of the pale vulnerable body and the dark splintered wheels, but the descriptive effect is intensified by the deliberately

angular rhythms. It is an object-lesson in the relationship between form and content.

From the contemplation of heavenly things and the philosophical discussions with the priests of the Madonna dell' Orto, Jacopo roused himself to execute a last series of commissions.

The church of San Giorgio Maggiore, on the little island of the same name that faces the Piazzetta, is one of Andrea Palladio's most satisfying designs. Its foundation stone was laid in 1566, the building was completed by 1590, and the two paintings by Tintoretto on the walls of the sanctuary were ordered shortly afterwards. These, the *Last Supper* and the *Gathering of Manna*, together with the *Pietà* in the mortuary chapel of the church, were certainly painted by Jacopo, but they are not the only paintings supplied to the church by the Tintoretto workshop in the years between 1590 and 1594. The structure once finished, the altarpieces with their architectural frameworks were ordered almost immediately, and two of these are known to have been commissioned in 1593. The paintings they contain—the *Martyrdom of St. Stephen* and the *Coronation of the Virgin*—are good Tintorettesque pictures, probably carried out by Domenico. In preparation for the former painting a drawing exists at Christ Church, Oxford, which is usually attributed to Domenico. A *Resurrection* and a *Martyrdom of Saints Cosmo and Damian*—a magnificently energetic but rather confused design—complete the series.

Seven major paintings, products of the family workshop, in the space of three or at most four years, would have been sufficiently remarkable at any time in Tintoretto's career. They were evidently done under considerable pressure from a church anxious to complete its interior decorations in the shortest possible time. It is useless in such a case to speculate about the part played, either in the design or the execution, by Jacopo, by Domenico, Marco or the other studio assistants. But it is improbable that anyone but Jacopo himself could have conceived or carried out anything as revolutionary as the *Last Supper*, as serene as the *Gathering of Manna*, or as profound as the *Entombment*. These three paintings can be regarded as the final statements of his creative mind in the same sense that the *Feast of the Gods* of 1514 was Giovanni Bellini's and the *Pietà* of 1576 was Titian's.

It is characteristic of the old man in his middle seventies that three pictures should be needed to make such a final statement complete. For Bellini it was enough to express the full flavour of robust paganism, for Titian, the dark sense of personal tragedy or pathos could be contained in a single picture. For Tintoretto's more complex personality more was needed. His *Entombment* (Pl. 71) is the counterpart of Titian's *Pietà*. Its mood is similar though the vision behind it utterly different. Titian's grief-stricken figures form a stage tableau seen against a heavy architectural set-piece that emerges from a dark void. Tintoretto's are huddled together in an open landscape—the landscape of a crepuscular dream—that leads the eye back to a sunset against which the abandoned crosses of Calvary are silhouetted. Stylistically, Titian's version is the unforgettable final word of Renaissance art. Tintoretto's is an uneasy prophecy of el Greco and of a century that was not yet born; yet despite its prophecy it has that oddly Byzantine look which el Greco is supposed to have derived from his own boyhood in Crete. He could as easily have found it, as did Tintoretto himself, on the walls of St. Mark's.

The two other pictures need not be described in detail. If the *Pietà* is Jacopo's last personal message, the *Last Supper* and the *Gathering of Manna* (Pl. 70) are his last universal messages. Again he returns to the mood of the Scuola of San Rocco, his belief in miracle, and his two heroes, Moses and Jesus. In an earlier chapter I compared the *Gathering of Manna* to Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony. It is a full-scale hymn of praise to the benevolent gentleness of Nature and to human contentment in a friendly world. It sums up the old man's optimistic belief in the destiny of man as an inhabitant of an unspoiled earthly paradise.

The *Last Supper* is a dark, haunted, enclosed picture. Bread is no longer a symbol of man's physical needs. This is a spiritual sacrament, and though, as always in his Last Suppers, the busy world presses in at the sides—the servants are more active than ever, and the cooks gather round the stove without any sense of interfering with the mystery that is taking place at the table—yet the dark air overhead is filled with the beating wings of angels.

Again, one is tempted to compare the painting with an even more famous version—Leonardo's. There is the same difference between a miraculously and lucidly arranged tableau a few feet

back from the footlights and with no hint of a containing world, and a vast space in which the artist is free to move and which his eye is free to explore from any angle, however unexpected. But here not only the vision but the mood is different. Leonardo's conception of the event is of a drama that affects thirteen men, each of whom can be seen as a participant, with his own role to perform, and the artist's task is to explain the part that each disciple plays. Tintoretto sees it as a mystery that affects the material and the spiritual world. For him, the dim phosphorescent light, the busy servants, the hovering angels, even the impenetrable shadows that surround them, are as important as Jesus and His disciples. They themselves are hardly more than instruments of the Divine will, and the actions they perform involve civilization in a set of unforeseen consequences. Such a conception could not be presented with the lucidity of a Leonardo.

The art historian who is willing to sacrifice relative importances to completeness of documentation can discover other paintings which could reasonably be attributed to these last four years, but they add little to our knowledge of his power and nothing to his stature as an artist.

Tintoretto died on the 31st of May 1594, after a fever that lasted fifteen days. Evidently he did not realize the seriousness of his own condition for his will was not made until the day before his death. He was buried in the Vescovi family vault in the Madonna dell'Orto. He was accompanied to the grave, says Ridolfi, "by a number of painters who wept for the death of their master and by notables and those who loved him."



## Chapter Fifteen

### CONCLUSION

EVERYONE who is familiar with the painting, both sacred and secular, of the early and middle seventeenth century in Italy, particularly in the Veneto and the plain of Lombardy, will know what a profound and often disastrous influence Tintoretto had on the generations that came after him. Domenico, who succeeded him as *chef d'atelier*, died in 1634, so that the strange new note that was sounded in its full intensity for the first time in 1548 continued to sound for forty years after Jacopo's death and for a full three-quarters of a century after it was first heard.

Art does not stand still for three-quarters of a century. The pictures Domenico was painting at the end of his life were very different from those that his father had produced as a youth. The verdict of history is that they were by no means as 'good.' The gigantic impetus had slackened. The Tintorettesque flavour had become diluted, and after Domenico's death it was to be diluted even more. But when one speaks of dilution one speaks also of the introduction of a new element. A flavour weakens not only because it loses its strength but also because new flavours begin to compete with it. The world we live in cannot die; it can only change. At every moment and in every corner little births and little deaths occur, altering the pattern of it very gradually. So that historians, looking back on a slice of time, see it only as a slice that slowly changes its colour and its texture throughout its length.

'Every period in history is transitional.' That was the first sentence in this book. It is an easy sentence to write for a historian addressing himself to a specific task. But that sentence could never find its way into the last chapter of a book, for by the time he reaches his last chapter the author's affections have become involved. He has singled out his chosen theme from a million possible themes. He has brooded over it, tried to understand it, identified himself

with it, watched it mature and then slowly lose itself in another theme. That process of change he can no longer, in his last chapter, regard merely as a transition. 'Every period in history,' he must now write, 'is a period of decline.' Had he been centring his affections on a later artist—Rubens or Elsheimer or the brothers le Nain—that same period in which he had been sadly watching the little deaths that cumulatively meant the decline of the Tintorettesque would have been a period of hope. For then he would have been eagerly counting the little births that would one day usher in the Rubensesque.

For myself, therefore, and for such of my readers as share my view that to watch Tintoretto's career is to fall in love with what he created, it is impossible to note without sadness his influence weakening as it spreads and his firm stride becoming a meaningless dance. Whenever that which one loves changes, change becomes synonymous with decay.

That monstrous brood of flying angels and posturing saints emerging in fitful melodramatic light from gloomy backgrounds, those tangled groups of swooning figures and writhing limbs that one discovers in a thousand Italian altarpieces of the early seventeenth century, all owe their existence to Tintoretto. Only a student of the pathology of art could enjoy them or write their history. Certainly not one who is looking backwards in the direction of their great progenitor. One day, doubtless, their history will be written. The names of their authors will be unearthed, and instead of being regarded as the shameful dying embers of the Venetian High Renaissance or even grouped together as Later Mannerists they will be seen as the hopeful beginnings of Baroque.

In this book, however, they cannot be so regarded. I have not the heart to unearth them. They had learned Tintoretto's tricks at second-hand, and they had imitated them without knowing why. What to Jacopo himself was inevitable was to them merely effective. Tintoretto's drama becomes their melodrama. What new things they contributed are bound to escape, or even to annoy, the eye that is admiringly fixed on the past.

In exactly the same way, the admirer of Titian is bound to see in Tintoretto's own paintings the first signs of decay. One understands the savage tone of Professor Roberto Longhi's attack on Tintoretto in his *Viatico per Cinque Secoli di Pittura Veneziana*,

published in 1946. It is the tone of an angry man who loved the Titianesque and regarded Tintoretto as its enemy and destroyer. Longhi enlarges on Boschini's phrase 'praticon di man,' of which the nearest translation is probably 'virtuoso,' and notes that Boschini has no intention of belittling his hero when he used it of Tintoretto. For Professor Longhi it *is* a belittling phrase. For him Tintoretto is sometimes a 'genial Zuccari or Vasari, sometimes a Greco without a soul.' He describes him as a clever manipulator of puppets who so far forgets himself as to lean too far out of the wings and allow his manipulating hands to be seen. 'A Mannerist? If only he were!' 'A genius suffocated by his own fatal facility.' A man who could never develop his own powers because he was incapable of that process of meditation that must come between conception and execution. It is time, he concludes, that Tintoretto's exaggerated reputation were deflated. How much finer those mechanically contrived dramas of his would have been in the hands of a Greco or a Rembrandt.

It is true that Jacopo's temperament is not universally acceptable. There is a type of mind which demands a certain tranquillity—the listening world of a Giorgione, the monumental hush of a Piero della Francesca—to which the restless dynamism of Tintoretto is inherently disturbing. But I do not think that accounts for Professor Longhi's distaste. I am not concerned with refuting him. One does not reason with a man who attacks. There is plenty of room for conflicting loyalties in this inexhaustible universe. But it is sometimes worth while to examine the state of mind that induced the attack.

The key to it is that heartfelt word 'Magari!' "Would that he were a Mannerist!" Meaning, presumably, would that he had been content to continue along the traditional lines so admirably laid down by Giovanni Bellini and Titian, turning their opulent poetry into a formula and adding a little stylistic piquancy to it, instead of creating a new world that would compete with it and eventually eclipse it. He resents the advent of a giant because he is so loyal to the lovely garden into which the giant has intruded. He cannot admire his stature because he is so horrified to see him trampling on the flowers.

Tintoretto did trample on the flowers, not because he disliked them but because he was no gardener. He did not quite destroy the

garden during his own lifetime, for his contemporary, Veronese, was busy keeping it in order and making it, in some ways, more delightful than it had ever been before. But with Veronese's death, six years before his own, it fell into decay: the forest closed in on it.

That is how the lover of Titian sees the situation. Not so the lover of Tintoretto. Greco could never have envisaged the golden-age splendour of the four Anticollegio allegories, nor could Rembrandt have dared to attempt the Old Testament epic of the ceiling in San Rocco or the dark pathos of its walls. That is not to belittle either el Greco or Rembrandt. Neither the ice-blue ecstasy of the former nor the profound intimacy of the latter were within Tintoretto's range. But we are surely concerned, with what *was* within his range. Professor Longhi pays Jacopo an unintended compliment in trying to dwarf him by setting him beside two of the greatest painters who ever attempted heavenly or earthly narrative. If one accepts the challenge and makes the comparison, one sees at once that Tintoretto quite remarkably anticipates them both and combines their qualities, though he misses the aristocratic intensity of the one and the democratic humanity of the other. Yet the seeds of both are latent in him.

But what makes him a giant is that he had a far greater range than either. Every artist is naturally supreme in his own chosen field. It is not necessary to be an el Greco or a Rembrandt in order to be unique. But the size of the chosen field is also of some importance provided the artist is completely himself in any and every corner of it.

Every artist re-creates the world he lives in, and re-creates it in his own terms. But the *portion* of the world which he can re-create is small. His repertory of form and colour will only contain a certain minimum of his total experience. Rembrandt's eyes only permit him to see well in the dark, Van Gogh's only in yellow sunshine, Mantegna can only be happy when he is re-creating rocks and hard surfaces, Constable when he is faced by softer or more mobile objects. Degas demands a world full of quick gesture, Cézanne a world of weight and stillness. El Greco has a vocabulary ready for whatever can happen in the upper air, Rubens's vocabulary is magnificently adequate for the earth.

No one has ever re-created more of the world than Tintoretto.



His eyes are more adaptable, his happiness less dependent on a narrow selection, his vocabulary more capable of handling whatever could be translated into visual terms than that of any other artist. What other painter has been equally equipped to follow the infant Jesus through rolling hills and gleaming lakes into Egypt, to share Christ's agony in Gethsemane, to join Him at the Last Supper, to gaze down with Him from the Cross on a busy, densely populated world; to proclaim the glowing temptation of Susanna bathing, to create the unapproachable loveliness of Venus and her tender gesture as she places her hand under Ariadne's, to visualize the serene pastoral life of the Israelites as they gathered the manna, the terror and turbulence of the Last Judgment, the ordered confusion of battle, or, finally, the limitless space and light of a Paradise pulsating with a kind of cosmic rhythm? Would all this have been better done if this man had been a Mannerist? Could any of it have been done at all by a man 'incapable of meditation'?

What is even more remarkable than his range is the moment of his appearance. Can the reader imagine himself in the Venice of Tintoretto's youth at the moment when the most richly sensuous of all schools of painting had just reached its glowing climax and was beginning to turn to heroics, and when the single figure of Titian seemed to fill the whole horizon, making rivalry impossible and competition useless? Would it have occurred to him that it was possible at such a moment to enlarge the whole scope of painting, to reserve the right to use that rich sensuousness whenever he chose, yet to turn his back on it whenever he found it inappropriate and explore the dark possibilities of the thundercloud and invent a new set of symbols for bodily suffering and agony of mind?

Perhaps the reader cannot realize what such a step demands. He may say that an honest man who feels passionately and dares to be himself can easily break loose from the spirit of his age merely by refusing to look back on his predecessors' achievements and by drawing all his strength from within himself; that if he is moved by the world's tragedy he can paint the world's tragedy. If so, the reader is wrong. Art history contradicts the theory that a man has only to observe closely and feel strongly in order to paint pictures such as have never been painted before and open the eyes of mankind to a set of possibilities they had never dreamed

of. If that were so, any artist could appear at almost any period. Praxiteles could have worked side by side with the carvers of the archaic Greek athletes of the seventh century B.C., Goya could have been a contemporary of Rubens, Constable of Giorgione, the cathedral of Chartres could have been built on the same hill and at the same moment as the Parthenon.

Art requires not only an artist but a language. And though a man's potentialities may be almost infinite, the language by means of which he expresses them is narrow and restricted. Moreover, he did not make it himself: he inherited it from his artistic ancestors who in their turn inherited it from theirs.

Even to liken what I have called his 'repertory of form and colour' to a language, is to make it seem far more flexible than it is. A closer analogy would be with a traveller's phrase-book by the aid of which he can easily say, 'You have charged me too much for my laundry,' or 'When does the train for Florence start?' but finds himself ill-equipped to explain in what way Plato differs from Aristotle or how he has been impressed by a sunset behind the Matterhorn.

If the artist's function were to 'copy Nature' he could conceivably work with an equipment that consisted of equal parts of patience and good eyesight. And the result might possibly resemble a chaotic fragment from the landscape background of Van Eyck's *Miracle of the Holy Lamb* at Ghent. But a moment would come, and it would come quite early in the process, when he would ask himself, 'Why am I doing this? As a means to what end?' And any of the thousand possible answers would compel him to close his eyes and *imagine*, rather than open them and *look*. Whereupon, in his mind's eye, he would see a picture that only dimly resembled the world of his physical eye. Giovanni Bellini would see a picture that looked rather like a Mantegna, Tintoretto would see an early Titian, Degas an Ingres, and each of them would be baffled by the mental picture's inadequacy.

For the phrase-book is always inadequate. It is always telling one how to say, 'When does the train leave for Florence?' when one passionately wants to ask, 'Will it get me there by lunch-time?' Slowly and painfully one can enlarge the phrase-book by turning to the chapter on restaurants and combining it with the chapter on railway stations, thereby achieving not merely a new

phrase but a new point of view—a point of view in which trains and meals stand in a new relationship to one another.

This phrase-book is all the artist has. That and his immortal soul are his only possessions. And his immortal soul can only communicate by means of the phrase-book with other immortal souls. He cannot invent new phrases. If he did, his words would be gibberish. He can only combine old ones. But certain artists have combined them so daringly (driven by their failure to find in the phrase-book anything that they urgently wanted to say) that they *seem* to have started a revolution. After them a 'new and enlarged' edition has to be published.

Giotto was one of these, the most daring of all. He explored the chapter on 'weights and measures,' combined it with the chapters on 'colour' and on 'behaviour' and doubled its usefulness for all his successors. Next to him, Tintoretto, in my opinion, was the most potent enlarger.

But art history has another unexpected lesson for us here. After each 'new and enlarged edition' one would expect a sudden stride forward in the potentialities of art, and a sudden spate of artists who had been waiting for the appearance of the new edition though they had not the creative energy to produce it themselves. One looks for this stride forward in vain. After Giotto comes a period of comparative impotence, after Tintoretto another. The artist's heritage has been doubled and he is bewildered by it, bowed down under its weight. He uses the new phrases wildly and without any real sense of their purpose. By enlarging the repertory of form and colour the genius positively cripples his successors and makes them at once inarticulate and garrulous.

Tintoretto opened up a new world in which light, space and movement were all interrelated. Consequently he could at will hover in the noonday heat in company with goddesses over the shores of the Aegean, or keep watch in the night beside the sleeping disciples, or inhabit Paradise. After him, it was possible for any lesser man to do the same. The repertory that would enable him to do so was available.

But as it turned out, though, after him, the means were at every artist's disposal, not one inherited his power to use them. 'Art requires,' I wrote a few pages back, 'not only an artist but a lan-

guage.' If the reader is convinced of that I can turn the sentence back to front and give it its more usual form. Art requires not only a language but an artist—a man who, when he closes his eyes, can *see*. When Jacopo Robusti, the little dyer of Venice, closed his eyes he saw deeper and further than almost any other man. When he opened them again he was ready to use his brush with that reckless fury which only a visionary dares to use with impunity.



## *Appendix*

### DATING ON THE EVIDENCE OF COSTUME AND HAIRDRESSING

by STELLA MARY PEARCE

SINCE every art historian naturally falls back upon internal evidence when he has failed to reach a conclusion on stylistic grounds, the variety of dates which have been given to Tintoretto's undated paintings suggests that the internal evidence they contain is enigmatic.

When it is remembered, however, that Veronese, who seems superficially so much more 'clothes-conscious' than Tintoretto, is almost equally difficult to date, that no agreement has been reached on several paintings by Titian which contain obviously stylish hairdressing and costume, and that few paintings by the Bassano family are dated, it becomes apparent that the weakness of the internal evidence in Tintoretto's painting may lie, not in any refusal on his part to be influenced by current fashion, but in the difficulty of determining what was, in fact, the current fashion at any particular moment in the second half of the sixteenth century, owing to the scarcity of firmly dated pictures.

The difficulty of tracing the pattern of fashion-development during this period is further complicated by four separate factors which are peculiar to the period itself, and which can cause considerable confusion. The first is the practice, inherited directly from Michelangelo and still popular in the 1550's, of using one fragment of contemporary dress—the *gonella*—to represent antique costume; the second is the fact that in the 1580's an actual fashion emerged which sufficiently resembled this Michelangelesque fragment as to be mistaken for it; the third is the persistence of one type of woman's dress which varied in detail, but which retained its fundamental character, during the whole of the second half of

the sixteenth century; and the fourth is the increasingly personal attitude of painters to their subject-matter, which caused each artist to *select* from the current fashion those aspects of it which best suited his temperament and the requirements of his pictures.

In the following pages I have examined certain paintings by Tintoretto which are difficult to date from stylistic evidence, and given, in the notes to each picture, reasons for dating them from the evidence of costume. It may, however, be appropriate to discuss here each of the four complicating factors I have mentioned above in more detail.

From the Middle Ages onwards the wardrobe of Italian women had consisted of three garments—the *gonella*, or sleeved chemise, the *guanacca*, or overdress, and the *mantello*, or outdoor wrap—and it was peculiar to Italy, with its warm climate, that the *gonella*, or chemise, worn alone, should be regarded as a correct though strictly informal dress. As early as the middle of the fourteenth century Ambrogio Lorenzetti dressed his figure of Peace in the chemise, worn alone, came to be regarded as a correct though free from fear of war, and later Botticelli used the chemise to represent a garment which is outside time. The interest of the fifteenth century in surviving works of art from Greece and ancient Rome led to isolated figures being dressed in what was the nearest approach, in the fashionable wardrobe, to the clothes of antiquity. This practice developed towards the end of the fifteenth century. Raphael, and especially Michelangelo, used the chemise consistently to clothe characters from the scriptures or from classical mythology. Several of the Mannerists, notably Parmigiano and Vasari, followed their example, and in Venice, Palma Vecchio, Titian, Tintoretto, and (to a less extent) Veronese used the chemise to represent a costume that was not of their own period. With the changing fashion the chemise naturally varied slightly from decade to decade, but its general character as a loose-fitting garment with no join at the waist remained the same. The masculine shirt, which closely resembled it, had from Giotto's time onwards been used by painters for exactly the same purpose.

As long as the *guanacca* (known by several other names including *gamurra*) or overdress remained invariably stiff and ample as to skirt and boned and tight-fitting as to bodice, the chemise, though it may through lack of visible detail occasionally be difficult to date,

is unmistakable; but when certain types of much softer overdresses began to appear in the fashionable wardrobe a considerable confusion arises. This confusion becomes more acute in the 1580's, by which time the baroque spirit had so far invaded dress that the traditional loose chemise and the newly loosened *gamurra* are almost indistinguishable. The situation is further complicated by the arrival, in the 1580's, of a hairdressing which superficially resembles that of the 1550's. In the 1580's too a loosening of

## ERRATUM

Page 216, lines 15 to 19 should read

chemise, worn alone, came to be regarded as a correct though strictly informal dress. As early as the middle of the fourteenth century Ambrogio Lorenzetti dressed his figure of Peace in the chemise alone, to symbolize the security of a home life which is free from fear of war, and later Botticelli used the chemise to

dramatized lighting of later sixteenth-century painting. An example of the new baroque fashion, and the typical sixteenth-century dress which survived as a secondary fashion, can be seen side by side in a drawing by Veronese, dated 1584, in the Ecole des Beaux Arts (No. 35608).

'Secondary' fashions, and similarity of detail between two fashions not widely separated in time, occur throughout the history of costume, but only when firmly dated pictures are scarce do they cause serious confusion, because then the precise sequence of fashion becomes difficult to determine. At the same time it is not *impossible* to trace the outlines of the changing fashions in the second half of the sixteenth century, both as they actually existed and as they appear through the eyes of Veronese and Tintoretto respectively. Tintoretto's system of lighting often makes details of costume extremely difficult to distinguish—the stylish dress of a woman on the left in the Madonna dell' Orto St. Agnes altarpiece (Pl. 47), for instance, emerges only after a prolonged scrutiny—but the hairdressing of his women is almost always clear and is not only carefully observed but is used consistently. Once Tintoretto adopted a new fashion he used the older one only for a very short

time, and for minor characters, before he abandoned it altogether. The hairdressing which he used all through the 1560's makes its first appearance alongside the style he had used in the 1550's, in the *Healing of the Paralytic* of 1559 (Pl. 42) in the Church of San Rocco. It appears again on one or two figures in the *Marriage at Cana* of 1561 (Pl. 16) in Santa Maria della Salute, on the only woman in the *Finding of the Body of St. Mark* (Brera, Milan) of 1562 (Pl. 20), and is worn by every woman in the *Madonna dell' Orto Worship of the Golden Calf* (Pl. 19). In the *Presentation of the Virgin* in the same church, dated between 1552 and 1556, there is no trace of it, and it has completely disappeared from the *Anticollegio* allegories and the *Temptation of St. Anthony* (Pl. 44) of the 'seventies.

The moment when Tintoretto records a change does not always coincide exactly with the appearance of the new fashion in Veronese's paintings, but the sequence is the same, and both painters treat the style of hairdressing which came into fashion at the end of the 'sixties in the same way. At that moment a fashion for wearing the hair brushed up into 'horns' on either side of the forehead became popular, but both painters, evidently feeling that this made the silhouette too eccentric to be used in serious works of art, modified it considerably. The modification took the form of flattening the upstanding horns but maintaining the fashionable line across the forehead, which left it exposed in an upward point on each temple, from which the hair had been brushed away. This forehead line, with the hair seeming to descend in a peak or crescent in the centre which is often emphasized by a pointed veil or string of pearls, appears at no other time in the sixteenth century, and makes the paintings of Tintoretto executed during the time it was in fashion datable to about a decade. In his dated paintings of the 'eighties and 'nineties it no longer appears.

Although at the first glance Veronese, because of his emphasis on rich materials and jewellery, seems to take a livelier interest in clothes than does Tintoretto, he was in fact less able to appreciate the underlying spirit of each fashion. His characters often have a slightly overdressed appearance as though they were wearing new clothes for the first time. Tintoretto, on the other hand, shows considerable understanding of the effect of clothes on their wearers, and the people in his canvases wear their clothes with such naturalness of pose and gesture that one might be tempted to think that



they are not wearing fashionable dress at all. The contrary is the case, and a closer examination shows that the reason why the clothes of his characters seem so much more generalized, so much less like fashion-plates, than those of Veronese, is his sensitivity to the alteration made by changes in the disposition of pressure and weight of clothes on the behaviour of the wearer. By putting oneself in the place of the men and women in his canvases one can *feel* the effect on the posture of the head caused by a hanging veil or a high-necked tunic. Tintoretto's attitude to clothes is exactly paralleled by his attitude to the human body. What was said on p. 80 about the nude—that he took 'it, emotionally in his stride without diminishing its importance'—can equally be said about his painting of clothes. If it is true (see p. 103) that 'he has no favourite passages in his painting,' it is also true that he has no feeling that dress is something to be dwelt on with more affection or intensity than anything else in his painting, as was certainly the case with Veronese. An amusing example of Tintoretto's attitude to clothes can be seen in the peeling off of the disciples' tights in the Escorial *Washing of Feet*, but no less vivid, though less spectacular, is the crook of the arm with which the Virgins hold up their heavy skirts in the San Lazzaro *St. Ursula* (Pl. 46) and the way their carriage is altered by the drag of their long trains on the ground behind them. Here is surely a record of the evening promenade in the Piazza.

The consistency with which Tintoretto uses a style of hair-dressing or a fashionable detail of dress as long as he considers it valid, and the thoroughness with which he discards it, makes it possible to follow the sequence of fashion through his eyes, and to group his paintings together in date. That the sequence revealed by his pictures represents faithfully a part of the development of the fashion of his time can be sufficiently verified by the handful of firmly dated paintings of his contemporaries. Like stones which are apparently scattered at random but which can, once a pattern has been discovered, suddenly confirm the archaeologist's happy guess, and even fill in further details, these dated paintings not only make it clear that Tintoretto was interested in changes of fashion but are an index of his strongly personal attitude to clothes. Tintoretto's consciousness of changing fashions in hairdressing is not surprising: it would be much more surprising if he ignored them.

The arrangement of the hair on the head is a piece of aesthetic design to which artists and laymen alike are sensitive, and the presentation of the face in a frame which has recently become out-moded is universally repulsive. The fact that firmly dated paintings during the latter part of his life are so few leaves some of Tintoretto's paintings impossible, at present, to date with certainty; in others, what would be valuable evidence is obscured by his characteristic use of lighting. Many are certainly datable within a decade, but few of them can be dated to within five years.

The interest that the second half of the sixteenth century took in clothes can be seen from the fashion-books which appeared during that time. These books were an innovation, and their authors were no less selective than the contemporary painters in the aspects of the fashion they chose to reproduce. Since they borrowed from each other, especially where foreign clothes were concerned, they are often dangerous witnesses, and even where the dress is Italian, Vecellio, the most painstaking amongst them, is narrow in his view of the fashion. Many obviously stylish details which appear in paintings are not recorded by him at all, and he is quite oblivious of the change to the baroque conception of clothes which was taking place as he wrote. He does show, however, the replacement of the stiff cage-like dress of the late 'fifties (noted by Bertelli in his fashion book of 1563), which swung just clear of the ground, by a much softer gown which almost always trailed on the ground behind. The fact that the train was actually disappearing at the time of the publication of his book in 1590 suggests that he had been working on the illustrations for some considerable time before publication.

*Venus and Vulcan* (Pl. 7). Munich (see p. 82).

*Hadeln*: Early period.

*Bercken-Meyer*: c. 1545.

*Tietze*: c. 1550-5.

*Pittaluga*: c. 1580.

The only 'costume' evidence which this painting contains is the hairdressing of Venus. This evidence, however, I consider to be conclusive, since it shows a fashion which only occurred during the early years of Tintoretto's activity. It was replaced, both in

his paintings and in those by other artists, by a completely different fashion in the very early 1550's.

The hairdressing of Venus consists of a centre parting from which the hair is brushed smoothly down on each side of the forehead, leaving the forehead line clear and semicircular. A roll or a plait of hair, or a roll of material, encircles the back of the head, giving, when seen from the front, the effect of a halo which repeats the line where the hair lies round the forehead.

The hairdressing of all the women in the Vienna cassone panels (see p. 74) corresponds exactly with that of the Venus. The hairdressing of the woman in the *Apollon and Marsyas* (see p. 41) differs from it only in being curly instead of straight. The same style, seen from above, appears in the *Miracle of the Slave*, 1548, but in this case the roll or plait of hair is covered by a little cap; its outline, however, shows clearly.

The encircling roll is a survival of the turbans and *balze* which reached the height of their popularity in the 1520's, after which they began to shrink in size. It is interesting to notice that a *balza* is worn by an old woman in a Sacred Conversation of 1540 by Tintoretto, in the Leger Collection, London. In the same painting the Madonna wears a veil which is puffed out to the fashionable line, which shows that the eye was still accustomed to the turban shape.

The Venus of *Venus and Vulcan* wears a plait which follows the turban-line; she also wears curls which hang down onto her shoulders, but this is not a specific fashion, it is an indication either of 'undress,' or of the fact that the wearer is a bride.

The centre parting and brushed-down (as against brushed-back) hair begins to reappear in the late 1580's, but it is not then accompanied by the encircling roll. I consider, therefore, that this painting could not have been executed after 1550, and it could be dated as early in Tintoretto's lifetime as other evidence allows.

*Deposition* (Pl. 15). Accademia, Venice (see p. 95).

*Thode*: 1560.

*Pittaluga*: A little later.

I should date this painting as early as stylistic evidence allows. Women in scenes of the Crucifixion and the Deposition, or

Entombment, are never dressed in the latest fashion, but the distance they are placed behind the fashion differs as between one painter and another, the average being about five years for the supporting figures and a little longer for the Madonna.

A near prototype of the headdress of the woman with green velvet drapery in her hair can be seen in Titian's *Presentation of the Virgin*, Venice Accademia, 1537-8, while a woman in the Bronzino *Deposition* of 1553 wears an exactly similar headdress. Since the subject is the same this would be a reasonable date for Tintoretto's *Deposition*.

The hairdressing of the Magdalen is of a type already out of fashion in the 'fifties. It has the centre parting, with the hair drawn down on either side of the forehead which Tintoretto uses in *Apollo and Marsyas* (Pl. 1), 1545, the Vienna cassone panels, and the *Miracle of the Slave* (Pl. 3), 1548. The encircling plaits also recall this period of the 'forties, but the extra plait entwined round them, on the top of the head, gives an added elaboration and is an indication that this is a transitional stage between the fashion in the paintings mentioned above and the Vienna *Susanna* hairdressing. The style corresponds to, though it is not exactly the same as, that of the women in the San Marcuola *Last Supper* (Pl. 2), 1547, but the subject of the painting under discussion places it a few years later than the *Last Supper*.

The details of the dresses, particularly the chemise of the Magdalen, and the chemise sleeves which seem to "ooze" out of the neck and shoulder line of the overdress from which the sleeves have been detached, accord with the dating shown by the hairdressing. This use of the overdress with the sleeves detached, and the chemise with the drawstring of the neck not tightened, denotes informality, working dress, or a state of hurried anxiety.

Owing to the practice of clothing the characters in particularly solemn subjects slightly behind the current fashion, it is impossible to date this painting exactly, but I consider that it could not possibly have been painted later than 1555, and I should prefer to date it between two and four years earlier.



*Susanna and the Elders* (Pl. 6). Vienna (see p. 81).

*Bercken-Meyer*: 1550's.

*Mostra catalogue*: Soon after 1560.

*Pittaluga*: 1570.

Since the dress which Susanna has taken off belongs to the type which was worn throughout Tintoretto's lifetime, it provides little evidence on which to date the painting. The line of a jewelled braid which runs down the front of the bodice suggests a date before the 1560's but is not conclusive, and no further distinguishing details can be seen. The picture, therefore, must be dated from the hairdressing of Susanna, which provides us with fairly narrow limits.

The hairdressing is used by Tintoretto to replace that worn by Venus in *Venus and Vulcan* (Pl. 7, see Appendix, p. 220); by the women in the Vienna cassone panels; and by the woman in *Apollo and Marsyas* (Pl. 1). Susanna is always shown as a fashionable woman, so that this style was no doubt very new when Tintoretto used it in this painting. It appears again on a subsidiary character, the woman seated on the steps, in the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Pl. 17) of Madonna dell' Orto of 1552-6, so that it is probable that Susanna was painted two or three years before this. Characteristic of the style are the plaits of hair which are pinned back from the forehead, and it is these plaits which prevent the fashion from being confused with that of the 1590's, which it superficially resembles.

From the evidence of this hairdressing I have no hesitation in dating the painting between 1550 and 1555.

*St. Ursula and the Virgins* (Pl. 46). San Lazzaro, Ospedale Civile, Venice (see p. 171).

*Tietze*: c. 1545.

*Pittaluga*: Before the *Miracle of the Slave*.

*Coletti*: A late picture, c. 1588.

*Palluchini*: c. 1544.

The extraordinary difference of the dates as between various authorities makes this a particularly interesting picture to examine, especially as it is full of women obviously dressed in the height of fashion.

The early date given by Tietze and Pittaluga is not supported by the evidence of costume, although there are certain details which could be regarded as pointing to the late 'forties. There is, for instance, a superficial general resemblance to the dell' Abbate Bologna frescoes of 1545-50: an overskirt, split up the front like those worn by some of the background figures can be found in Titian's portrait of the *Empress Isabella* of 1548 (actually an attempt at a past fashion since it was painted by Titian after the death of the sitter): and some of the pearl-sewn caps recall Titian's *Eleanora Gonzaga* portrait of 1536-8 (though they are much nearer to the cap which appears in the Pitti copy of Titian's *Duchess Varena of Urbino*, a copy of which appears to me much later than the original could be).

The dell' Abbate dresses, while they share some of the details of those of the *St. Ursula* picture, do not resemble them at all in spirit. Their long boned bodices enforce an upright carriage, whereas the *St. Ursula* bodices, which, where they are boned at all, have a long point in front only, and a train behind, compel the wearer to walk with the shoulders thrown back and the hips thrust forward. This deportment, which appears in the fashion-books of 1580 and 1590 (see Appendix, p. 220) Tintoretto portrays with considerable understanding.

The split-open skirts are by no means limited to the 'forties but are equally fashionable in the 'seventies and 'eighties, and the pearl caps reappear in the 'seventies, when they are worn with a style of hairdressing quite unlike that of *Eleanora Gonzaga*. This later hairdressing occurs in the *St. Ursula* painting.

The *St. Ursula* clothes are characteristic of the mid-1570's. The soft amplitude of the dresses, which flow down from the hips in folds that proclaim the absence of stiffened or hooped underskirts, belongs to the last quarter of the century. This softening of the fashion is further emphasized by the sashes worn by the Saint herself and by at least one figure in the background. These sashes, which appear in several of Tintoretto's later paintings, are not widely used by other painters, but it is significant that Veronese's *Sta Giustina* wears one in the drawing of her martyrdom (in the Duke of Devonshire's collection), though it has been omitted from the finished painting of 1575 in Padua. This suggests that the sash was fashionable at the time, since drawings usually show

current fashions in more detail than do paintings, and Veronese actually used one which is exactly similar to St. Ursula's in the Dresden *Finding of Moses* (and in the other versions of the same subject). This painting is dated by Fiocco 1575 and universally accepted as being of about that date.

In Tintoretto's *Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine* in the Ducal Palace, a painting of 1581-4, St. Catherine wears the same sash, but certain other details (e.g. the short, puffed oversleeve, and the way the transparent veil is attached to the back of the head) make it impossible to date the *St. Ursula* as late as the *St. Catherine*. These sashes, which are not used to define the waist but tied loosely over full skirts, mark the appearance of the baroque spirit in clothes by softening them *from the outside*, the usual process by which a stiff fashion is gradually transformed into a soft fashion. By cutting across the skirt they help to destroy that sharp dividing of the dress into skirt and bodice which is one of the distinguishing features of the dress of women during the Italian Renaissance, and they accustom the eye to a horizontal line at a lower level than the waist, and are thus prophetic of the tunic of the 'eighties (see Appendix, p. 229).

Further evidence for dating *St. Ursula* in the 1570's can be found in the necklines, the veils and the hairdressing. From the middle of the 'sixties onwards Tintoretto uses a neckline which is much higher than those of his early period. Except for scenes of extreme violence such as the San Rocco *Massacre of the Innocents*, no décolletage occurs comparable with the type worn by women in *Apollo and Marsyas* (Pl. 1, 1545), the San Marcuola *Last Supper* (Pl. 2, 1547), the *Miracle of the Slave* (1548), *St. George and his Princess, with St. Louis* (1552), or the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Pl. 17, 1552-6). The line is lowered again in some dresses of the 'nineties but never reaches the décolletage of the 'forties and 'fifties. This raising of the neckline is due to the fact that the line itself no longer depends on the tightening of the drawstring of the chemise. The line of the *overdress* is now raised, so that the chemise seldom shows at this late period. Its place is taken by the fichu or the head-veil, which may be tucked into the front of the dress. Veronese often deliberately shows a dress unbuttoned or pulled apart (see Sta Giustina's dress, 1575, which if buttoned would exactly resemble that of St. Ursula), making the undress of martyrdom or of an agitated

state of mind an excuse for continuing to expose the bosom, but Tintoretto seldom avails himself of these methods.

The veils of some of the girls in the background, which cover the forehead, correspond exactly to those in Jacopo Bassano's *Preaching of St. Paul* in Sant' Antonio in Marostica of 1574. Tintoretto uses them again in the San Rocco *Resurrection* (1577-8), and the fact that the *St. Ursula* dresses are obviously very fashionable, whereas women in the *Resurrection* are never dressed in the latest fashion, suggests that 1577 would be too late a date for the San Lazzaro painting.

Apart from the evidence provided by the general character of the clothes, which can be recognized instinctively but is difficult to discuss, hairdressing in this painting, as elsewhere, is the most conclusive evidence. The hairdressing which is worn by several of the *St. Ursula* figures is of the type which does not appear anywhere before the end of the 'sixties, and which does not appear in any dated paintings by Tintoretto until the 'seventies. The hair is swept upwards and backwards on either side of the forehead so that the forehead looks square. This style is particularly noticeable in the case of two or three of the girls on the extreme right, and in several of the figures in the background. Just as in the four Anti-collegio allegories (1578), Tintoretto does not use this squareness for every woman, but he does invariably use the swept-back hair in this period, in contrast to the brushed-down hair of the 'forties. The fact that among the veils which do *not* cover the forehead there are several which are drawn forward to a point also places this painting in the 'seventies, from which time onwards these pointed veils were used by most of Tintoretto's contemporaries though he himself largely abandons them in the 'eighties.

There are numerous minor details which suggest that the painting should be placed in the 'eighties, but the hairdressing alone rules out any possibility that it could have been painted before 1570, and taken together with the rest of the evidence I have no hesitation in dating it between 1573 and 1575.



*The Miracle of St. Agnes* (Pl. 47). Madonna dell' Orto, Venice (see p. 169).

*Bercken-Meyer*: Before the *Miracle of the Slave*. 1548.

*Tietze*: Close to the *Miracle of the Slave*. 1548.

*Pittaluga*: Earlier than the paintings in the Choir. 1552-66.

*Hadeln*: The end of the 'sixties.

*Coletti*: c. 1577.

*Adolfo Venturi*: Partly by Marietta, therefore late.

This painting is, from the evidence of costume, close in date to *St. Ursula and the Virgins* (Pl. 46) in San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti (see Appendix, p. 223). It is in my opinion a few years later than *St. Ursula*, but the arrangement of the figures, which conceals, behind the man in armour and the senator in ceremonial robes, so many dresses which would, if completely visible, provide valuable evidence, makes it more difficult to date exactly than the painting of *St. Ursula*.

The unbelted dress of St. Agnes is a type first used by Tintoretto for the very stylish woman in *San Rocco in Prison* (Pl. 35) in the church of San Rocco, 1568, but St. Agnes's dress is cut higher at the neck, which places it in the 'seventies rather than in the 'eighties. A dress very like St. Agnes's is worn by the Madonna in Veronese's *Coronation of the Virgin* of 1584 (Accademia), but since the dress of the Madonna is always set behind the current fashion (though as a rule rather less so in the *Coronation* than in other subjects), this date would place Tintoretto's painting up to five years earlier.

A young girl, to whom the man in armour leans over and speaks, wears a dress which is similar to those of several of the background figures in *St. Ursula*. This dress is extremely difficult to discover, but once the eye has extricated it from its surroundings it will be seen that it has the bodice which comes to a long point in front. The stance of the girl, with thrust-forward hips, corresponds to the *St. Ursula* deportment and definitely precludes a date before the 'seventies, since it implies a dragging train to the dress.

The hairdressing of the women closely resembles that in the *St. Ursula* painting, and is of the type used by Tintoretto in the 'seventies. Examples of this hairdressing can be seen in the Anticollegio allegories (Pls. 54-57), 1578, and the *Temptation of St. Anthony* (Pl. 44), 1577. The arrangement of the veils suggests

that while the *St. Agnes* is a few years later than *St. Ursula*, it is definitely earlier than the Ducal Palace *Marriage of St. Catherine* (1581-4) and may be a little earlier than the Anticollégio allegories.

*The Madrid Panels* (see p. 171).

*Pittaluga*: Probably painted in the youthful period.

*Tietze*: Not before the end of the 1550's.

*Coletti*: c. 1555.

*Palluchini*: c. 1544.

The period suggested by Coletti and Palluchini is impossible to sustain from the evidence of costume. These panels might, from a Parmigianesque flavour which appears in some of the dresses, be allotted to the earliest period of Tintoretto's activity (though a comparison with the Vienna cassone panels, which are universally accepted as early works, makes it clear that he did not use Parmigiano's conventions for clothes at this period), but I can see no evidence for placing them in the 1550's. In my opinion, however, the panels cannot be placed in the very early period either, because the characteristics of costume which I think authorities regard as being Parmigianesque, derive from a source which was not Parmigiano himself, but which he shared with Tintoretto and other painters of the sixteenth century. This source was the Orient.

Vecellio's fashion-books published in 1590 can be used only with considerable discretion, but in certain respects they can be accepted as reliable. Since he lived in Venice, a city where many traders from the Near East assembled, he would in all probability report on the clothes of these orientals with reasonable accuracy as to their general character, though he would naturally be influenced by his own city and epoch where details were concerned. The fashions of the Orient alter more slowly than those of Western Europe, so that the clothes reported by Vecellio probably remained in fashion, and *had* remained in fashion, for a considerable time.

Tintoretto frequently includes oriental men in his biblical scenes—their turbans are recognizable and familiar—but the social position of oriental women has made their clothes much less familiar and therefore less easy for us to recognize in sixteenth-century painting, and it is difficult to be certain whether or not the paintings of Tintoretto and his contemporaries include women in oriental

dress. Reference to Vecellio, however, shows that a straight dress covered by an over-tunic which reaches to a little below the knee was worn by women of 'Rhodes' and 'Persia,' and I have little hesitation, at moments when no corresponding garment appears in contemporary portraiture, in detecting, in a costume which includes this straight tunic—whether it occurs in Parmigiano, Tintoretto or any other painter of the last three-quarters of the sixteenth century—an attempt to reproduce oriental dress. The attempt, as a rule, ends there, and the hairdressing and other details of the costume belong to contemporary Venetian fashion, though Tintoretto occasionally introduces other oriental elements.

In the Madrid panels two women wear straight tunics with coarse fringed borders, and it seems probable that these represent oriental dress, and so do similar tunics when they appear in the works of Parmigiano. Since, however, the Madrid panels contain many details of costume which could only belong to the last fifteen years of Tintoretto's life, these tunics, although they might seem to imply an early date, cannot be regarded as doing so.

Details of costume which belong to the 1580's to 1590's include the following:

(1) Tunics which are quite unlike the 'oriental' type mentioned above. These end above the knee and are bell-shaped, flaring out from the waist. A tunic of this kind is worn by the girl who holds the basket in the *Finding of Moses* panel (Pl. 50); exactly similar tunics appear in the Ducal Palace *Paradiso* (Pl. 64), 1587, in the Munich *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Pl. 45, see Appendix, p. 232) and in the Louvre *Paradiso* sketch (Pl. 63). These bell-shaped tunics appear also in the work of other painters of the period; an excellent example can be seen in a tiny picture by Bernardo Zuccaro in the Corsini Palace, Rome, dated 1592. The silhouette produced by these tunics worn over a clinging or split-open skirt is quite unlike anything which was worn during the early or middle period of Tintoretto's activity.

(2) The short puffed over-sleeves which are held by a jewelled band and which do not match the material of the long under-sleeve. Tintoretto uses these sleeves only in the Madrid panels, in the Ducal Palace *Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine*, and in the centre ceiling panel in the Sala del Senato, 1581-4. They appear in a *Birth of the Virgin* by Alessandro Allori, in Cortona, of 1595, in

Veronese's *Uffizi Esther* which, though not dated, is, from other evidence of costume, a late work of the 'eighties, and a slight variation of them can be found in Tommaso Laureti's *Madonna and Saints* in Bologna, of 1580-2. These short puffed over-sleeves are not at all like the puffed sleeve-top which appears in Parmigiano's portrait of *Camilla Gonzaga* (Prado, 1538), a fashion which was popular at that time.

Another type of full short sleeve, worn with no under-sleeve, is to be found in the Madrid panels and is worn by the girl who holds the basket in the *Finding of Moses*. This type of sleeve is extensively used by Tintoretto in the sketch for the *Paradiso* and in the *Paradiso* itself, and it also appears in the Munich *Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*. It is common in the works of most painters of the 1580's and 1590's: several examples are to be found in the work of Baroccio and Allori, among other artists. These two types of short sleeve mark the beginning of a revival of the fashion for short puffed sleeves which persists until the end of the seventeenth century.

(3) A type of bodice new to Tintoretto appears four times in the Madrid panels. In the *Queen of Sheba* it is worn by the woman on the extreme right, and in *Esther* by a woman on the extreme left, a woman just left of the centre, and by Esther herself. The bodice terminates in a row, or several rows, of scallops below the waist-line, and an exact counterpart can be found in a drawing by Veronese (Ecole des Beaux Arts, No. 35608) dated 1485. Several examples of this type of bodice, which somewhat resembles mock armour, can be found in paintings of the 1590's.

(4) The long clinging dresses with no cut at the waist, which are split up at the front or at one side to show an underskirt, are a revival of a similar fashion which occasionally appeared in the 1530's. Used at this late period they are a sign of the baroque spirit in dress. A similar skirt is used by Tintoretto for a very clearly defined woman on the extreme left in the *Paradiso* sketch (Louvre).

(5) The hairdressing shows the 'elongated' head typical in Tintoretto's painting of the late period, and used by most painters at the end of the century. In the Madrid panels it shows most clearly on the girl in front of the column in *Esther* and the princess in the *Finding of Moses*. It occurs constantly in the *Paradiso* painting and the Louvre sketch, on the women in the background on the



left in the San Giorgio Maggiore *Last Supper* (Pl. 69), c. 1593 (here the hair is veiled but the elongated shape shows), and on a woman in the background in the *Gathering of Manna* in San Giorgio Maggiore of the same date. This popular hairdressing of the 1580's and 1590's can be seen in its most elaborate yet most typical form in Jacopo Zucchi's *Psyche and Cupid*, where the difference between this fashion and that of the 1550's, with which it is sometimes confused, is clearly apparent.

(6) The general character of the dresses is quite different from anything in firmly dated early works of Tintoretto. When they are compared with those in the Vienna cassone panels it will be seen how much more baroque in spirit are the clothes in the Madrid panels. The body, richly embellished with jewellery, scale-like scallops, patterned brocades and fringes, is nevertheless treated as a whole. The bodices are not clearly divided from the skirts, the hanging ringlets unite the heads and the necklines of the dresses, creating an elaborate yet flowing line.

In view of the fact that authorities are unanimous in considering these panels to be early works, it is interesting to note that a drawing in the Museum at Rennes, reproduced by Tietze in *Drawings of the Venetian Painters*, shows a woman wearing clothes which are almost identical with those of several of the figures in the panels. The drawing is not dated, but Tietze suggests a possible link with an engraving of 1588.

I do not feel able to date these panels to within a year or two, but I regard them as undoubtedly belonging to the last ten years of the painter's life.

*Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* (Pl. 45). Munich (see p. 167).

*Pittaluga*: c. 1570.

*Coletti*: c. 1577.

*Pinakothek catalogue*: 1570-80.

*Mostra catalogue*: 1570-80.

*Thode*: 1570-80.

From the general character of the dresses of the three women I should place this painting in the 'eighties, probably before 1587, though I should not completely exclude the possibility that it might have been painted at the end of the seventies.

The short tunic worn by Martha, that flares out from the waist and ends above the knee (see Appendix, p. 229), was evidently a fashion which interested Tintoretto. He used it repeatedly in his paintings of the 'eighties and 'nineties (but in no datable painting earlier than 1587), during which period it can also frequently be found in the works of other artists.

Tintoretto's liking for a line that cuts across the figure above the knees can be seen from his partiality for looped-up overskirts, two of which appear in the San Zaccaria *Birth of St. John*. The curious afterthought (easily seen in the underpainting) which substituted a dress with an unbroken line from the waist down for a tunic and underskirt in the costume of St. Catherine in two of the series of paintings for the church of Sta Caterina, is evidently an indication of Tintoretto's preference for this effect of a broken line, which he must have decided was in this case undesirable from the point of view of design. Both the Empress in *St. Catherine in Prison* and the principal attendant in the *Capture of St. Catherine* wear tunics. These, and a subsidiary female figure in the background of the *Disputation with the Emperor Maxentius* who also wears a tunic, are the only women besides the saint herself who are drawn at full length in these paintings.

The type of tunic worn by Martha, and associated, as it is in the painting under discussion, with an elbow sleeve and bare forearm, appears both in the Louvre *Paradiso* sketch (Pl. 63), where it is worn by the majority of the women, and in the *Paradiso* itself (Pl. 64, 1587). In this painting St. Agnes, who is placed just behind Sta Giustina on the left over the door, wears a dress so much like that of Martha, that I should regard the similarity as sufficient proof that the *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary* is very near the *Paradiso* in date. A drawing of two women wearing exactly similar dresses, by Francesco Bassano (Uffizi, No. 1892), is dated 1587. In this painting the tunics are worn with wide sashes which, like the belts of Martha and Mary, define the waist at the natural line instead of passing loosely round the hips like St. Ursula's sash in the San Lazzaro painting (Pl. 46). The sleeves in the drawing are full-length, but they are cut on the same principle as those in the Munich painting: that is to say, they are gently rounded and ample instead of being puffed at the shoulder and tight below like those of St. Catherine in the Ducal Palace.

If the Louvre *Paradiso* sketch can be taken as that submitted by Tintoretto for the competition of 1579, the fact that in it several women are dressed in tunics, and that in the *Paradiso* itself it is worn by St. Agnes, who is one of the very few women shown clearly at full length, whereas the fashionably dressed St. Catherine (1581-4) in the Ducal Palace is still wearing a St. Ursula sash instead of a tunic, suggests that this was a moment when Tintoretto was embarking on one of those fashion changes which divide his work into periods from the costume point of view. It seems that once he had adopted the tunic he continued to use it until his death. The appearance of the loosely knotted sash of the Ducal Palace St. Catherine and the San Lazzaro St. Ursula (see Appendix, p. 225) was probably a precursor, in the development of sixteenth-century fashion, of the tunic, since it accustomed the eye to a horizontal break below the waist. The tunic appears in no *dated* painting by Tintoretto before the *Paradiso*, but from the evidence of hairdressing I think it is extremely likely that he actually used it first at the beginning of the 'eighties in *Christ in the House of Martha and Mary*.

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# PAINTINGS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Abbreviations in column of dates

+ = or possibly later.

— = or possibly earlier.

Churches or buildings, unless otherwise stated, are in Venice. Figures in brackets refer to the Appendix.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1540	<i>Sacra Conversazione</i> Leger Collection, London	73 (221)
Probably earlier than 1545	Cassone Panels, Galleria, Vienna <i>Belshazzar's Feast</i> <i>The Queen of Sheba before Solomon</i> <i>The Removal of the Ark of the</i> <i>Covenant</i> <i>Bathsheba before David</i> <i>The Promise to David</i> <i>The Death of Samson</i>	74, 75 (221, 223) 74, 75 74 74 74 74
1545	<i>Apollo and Marsyas</i> Private Collection, London	9, 41, 42, 55, 57, 73 (221, 222, 223, 225)
1547	<i>Last Supper</i> San Marcuola	22, 42, 74, 75, 76, 107 (222, 225)
1547	<i>Christ Washing the Feet of St. Peter</i> Escorial	75 (219)
1548	<i>Miracle of the Slave</i> Accademia	4, 7, 8, 22, 30, 43 ff. 53, 76, 90, 109, 146, 170 (221, 222, 225)
1549	<i>St. Marcelliano with St. Peter and</i> <i>St. Paul</i> San Marziale	76, 77
1549	<i>San Rocco healing the Plague-stricken</i> <i>in Hospital</i> Church of San Rocco	77, 140, 142, 144, 146
1550—	<i>Venus and Vulcan Drawing</i> Neues Museum, Wiesbaden	88
Not after 1550	<i>Venus and Vulcan</i> Alte Pinakothek, Munich	82, 92, 167 (220, 221, 223)

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1550-51	<i>Creation of Animals</i> Accademia	46, 78
1550-51	<i>Temptation of Adam</i> Accademia	46, 47, 78, 80, 82
1550-51	<i>Death of Abel</i> Accademia	46, 48, 78
1550-51	<i>Forbidden Apple</i> Uffizi, Florence	46, 78
1550-51	<i>Creation of Eve</i> (lost)	46, 78
1550+	<i>Narcissus</i> Colonna Gallery, Rome	80, 81
1550+	<i>Leda</i> Contini Collection, Florence	82, 92
1550-55	<i>Susanna and the Elders</i> Vienna	66, 81, 82, 90, 92 (222, 223)
1550-55	<i>Entombment</i> Accademia	95, 96 (221, 222)
1552	<i>SS. Andrew and Jerome</i> Accademia	46, 77, 83
1552	<i>St. George and his Princess with St. Louis</i> Accademia	46, 77, 83 (225)
1552+	<i>Assumption</i> Torcello	83
1552+	<i>Madonna in Glory</i> Modena	83, 84
1552+	<i>Votive Painting, SS. Andrea, Girolamo, Alvis</i> Accademia	84
1552+	<i>Presentation of the Virgin</i> Madonna dell'Orto	49, 77, 94, 97, 102, 169 (218, 223, 225)
1552+	<i>Vision of St. Peter</i> Madonna dell'Orto	97
1552+	<i>Martyrdom of St. Christopher</i> Madonna dell'Orto	97
1555-60	<i>Crucifixion</i> Accademia	84 ff., 95
1555±	<i>Birth of St. John Baptist</i> San Zaccaria	89
1556+	<i>St. George and the Dragon</i> National Gallery, London	57, 66, 92, 96
1556+	<i>Rescue of Arsinoe</i> Dresden	81, 92

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1556	<i>Conversion of St. Paul</i> (lost) S. M. Zobenigo	96
1556	<i>Two Panels of Evangelists</i> S. M. Zobenigo	96
1556+	<i>Crucifixion</i> Gesuati	94
1559	<i>Healing of the Paralytic</i> Church of San Rocco	140 ff., 148 (218)
1559-67	Salotto Quadrato Ceiling. <i>Doge Priuli receiving the Sword and Scales from Justice</i> Ducal Palace	181, 185
1560±	Sala degli Inquisitori Ceiling. <i>The Parable of the Prodigal Son and four allegorical figures</i> Ducal Palace	181, 192
1561	<i>Marriage at Cana</i> Sta. Maria della Salute	20, 49, 94, 102, 104 (218)
1561±	<i>Finding of the Cross by St. Helena</i> Sta. Maria Mater Domini	107
1562	<i>Finding of the Body of St. Mark</i> Brera, Milan	21, 50, 104, 105 (218)
1562	<i>Removal of the Body of St. Mark</i> Accademia	49, 104 ff., 169
1562	<i>Rescue of the Saracen</i> Accademia	22, 106
1564	<i>San Rocco in Glory</i> and Ceiling Panels, Albergo Scuola of San Rocco	115 ff., 122, 131, 163
1564±	<i>Last Supper</i> San Trovaso	50, 58, 107, 108, 110, 167
1565±	<i>Last Supper</i> San Polo	50, 51, 107, 110, 172
1565	<i>Crucifixion</i> Albergo, Scuola of San Rocco	63, 84, 115, 118 ff., 138
1565	<i>Resurrection</i> San Cassiano	164
1566—	<i>Last Judgment</i> Madonna dell'Orto	17, 22, 90, 98 ff., 144, 200
1566	<i>Worship of the Golden Calf</i> Madonna dell'Orto	19, 22, 83, 98, 99, 101, 144 (218)
1566	{ <i>Christ before Pilate</i> <i>Carrying of the Cross</i> <i>Ecce Homo</i> Albergo, Scuola of San Rocco	121 121 121

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1567—	<i>Sketch for the Capture of San Rocco</i> Private Collection, London	147
1567	<i>Capture of San Rocco</i> Church of San Rocco	140, 143 ff., 147
1567	<i>San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison</i> Church of San Rocco	140, 143 ff., 147 (227)
1568	<i>Crucifixion</i> San Cassiano	164
1568	<i>Descent into Limbo</i> San Cassiano	164, 165
1568—92	<i>Mosaic Cartoons</i> San Marco	194 ff.
1573—75	<i>St. Ursula and the Virgins</i> San Lazzaro	75, 167, 171 (219, 223 ff.)
1573—78	<i>Miracle of St. Agnes</i> Madonna dell'Orto	167, 169 (217, 227)
1576	<i>Raising of Lazarus</i> Lubeck	166
1576—1577+	<i>Ceiling Panels of the Upper Hall</i> Scuola of San Rocco	123 ff.
	<i>The Temptation of Adam</i>	125, 130
	<i>Moses Striking the Rock</i>	123, 125, 130
	<i>The Passage of the Red Sea</i>	125
	<i>The Vision of Moses</i>	125
	<i>Jonah Rescued from the Whale</i>	125
	<i>The Brazen Serpent</i>	123, 125, 127, 129
	<i>Jacob's Dream</i>	127
	<i>Ezekiel's Vision</i>	127
	<i>The Saving of Isaac from Sacrifice</i>	127
	<i>The Gathering of Manna</i>	123, 125, 127, 130
	<i>Elisha's Multiplication of the Loaves</i>	127
	<i>Elijah Fed by the Angel</i>	127
	<i>The Paschal Feast</i>	127
1577	<i>Temptation of St. Anthony</i> San Trovaso	80, 166, 189 (218, 227)
1577+	<i>San Rocco with the Animals</i> Church of San Rocco	140, 143, 144, 145
1577+	<i>San Rocco in the Desert</i> Church of San Rocco	140, 143 ff., 149
1577+	<i>Origin of the Milky Way</i> National Gallery, London	73, 167, 168



<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1577+	<i>Sala delle Quattro Porte</i> (ceiling frescoes) Ducal Palace	183, 185
	<i>Jupiter Assigning to Venice the Command of the Adriatic</i>	185
	<i>Juno Offering the Peacock and the Thunderbolt to Venice</i>	185
	<i>Venice Surrounded by the Virtues</i>	185
	<i>Eight Figures Symbolising the Cities of the Veneto</i>	185
1577-1581	<i>Walls of the Upper Hall</i> Scuola of San Rocco	50, 56, 124, 132 ff., 177
	<i>The Temptation of Christ</i>	125, 132, 134
	<i>The Nativity</i>	125, 132
	<i>The Pool of Bethesda</i>	134
	<i>The Baptism</i>	134, 135
	<i>The Ascension</i>	127, 135, 136
	<i>The Resurrection</i>	127, 135, 136
	<i>The Raising of Lazarus</i>	127, 136
	<i>The Agony in the Garden</i>	127, 136, 137
	<i>The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes</i>	127, 138
	<i>The Last Supper</i>	127, 138
1577-84	<i>Annunciation</i> Church of San Rocco	114, 140, 141, 144, 145
1577-84	<i>San Rocco and the Pope</i> Church of San Rocco	140, 144, 145
1578+	<i>Nine Muses</i> Hampton Court, England	170
1578+	<i>Concert of Women</i> Dresden	170
1578+	{ <i>Last Supper</i> <i>Agony in the Garden</i> <i>Washing of the Feet</i> San Stefano	108, 172 172 51, 58, 172
1578	<i>Anticollégio Allegories</i> Ducal Palace	66, 80, 96, 170, 183 ff.
	<i>The Forge of Vulcan</i>	185
	<i>Mercury and the Three Graces</i>	51, 185, 189
	<i>Bacchus and Ariadne</i>	23, 185, 188
	<i>Minerva Protecting Peace and Abun- dance from Mars</i>	185
1578-85	<i>Sala del Maggior Consiglio</i> Ducal Palace Ceiling Panels:	193

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
	<i>Triumph of Doge Nicolo da Ponte</i>	193
	<i>Defence of Brescia</i>	193
	<i>The Defeat of Filippo Maria Visconti</i>	193
	<i>The Defeat of Ercole, Duke of Ferrara</i>	193
	<i>The Capture of Gallipoli</i>	193
	<i>The Venetian Ambassadors before Frederick Barbarossa</i>	192
1579	<i>First Four Gonzaga Histories</i> Pinakothek, Munich	172
	<i>The Emperor Creating Gianfrancesco Gonzaga First Marquis of Mantua</i>	174
	<i>The Defeat of the Venetians at Panego</i>	174
	<i>The Relief of Legnano by Frederick I</i>	174
	<i>The Battle on the Taro</i>	174
1580	<i>Second Four Gonzaga Histories</i> Pinakothek, Munich	172 ff.
	<i>The Capture of Milan</i>	175
	<i>The Capture of Parma</i>	175
	<i>The Capture of Pavia</i>	176
	<i>Philip IV's entry into Mantua</i>	177
1580+	<i>Christ in the House of Martha and Mary</i> Pinakothek, Munich	167, 188 (229, 231 ff.)
1581-1584	<i>Sala del Collegio</i> Ducal Palace	190
	<i>Votive Picture of Doge Francesco Donato (Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine)</i>	190 (225, 229)
	<i>Votive Picture of Doge Nicolo da Ponte</i>	191
	<i>Votive Picture of Doge Alvise Mocenigo</i>	191
	<i>Votive Picture of Doge Andrea Gritti</i>	191
1581-1584	<i>Venice Enthroned (ceiling panel)</i> <i>Dead Christ with Doges Pietro Lando and Marcantonio Trevisan</i>	192 191
	<i>Sala del Senato</i> Ducal Palace	

<i>Date</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
1583-87	Walls of Lower Hall Scuola of San Rocco	151 ff.
	<i>The Annunciation</i>	114, 151, 153 ff.
	<i>The Adoration of the Magi</i>	152, 157
	<i>The Flight into Egypt</i>	152, 156, 160, 162
	<i>The Massacre of the Innocents</i>	152, 156, 157
	<i>St. Mary Magdalen in the Desert</i>	152
	<i>St. Mary of Egypt</i>	152
	<i>The Presentation in the Temple</i>	152, 157
	<i>The Assumption</i>	152, 157
1584-87	<i>Battle of Zara. Sala dello Scrutinio,</i> Ducal Palace	183, 193, 194
1584-94	Six Panels Prado, Madrid	91, 171 (228 ff.)
1587-	<i>Sketch for Paradiso</i> Louvre	197, 198 (229, 232, 233)
1587	<i>Visitation</i> Scuolo of San Rocco	155, 161, 163
1588+	<i>Paradiso</i> Ducal Palace	51, 53, 61, 163, 183, 197 ff. (232, 233)
1588+	St. Catherine Series Accademia	202 ff.
	<i>The Capture of St. Catherine</i>	202, 203 (232)
	<i>St. Catherine and the Wheels</i>	202, 203
	<i>The Disputation with the Emperor</i> Maxentius	202 (232)
	<i>The Disputation with the Alexan-</i> <i>drian Doctors</i>	202
	<i>The Empress Visiting St. Catherine</i> <i>in Prison</i>	220 (232)
	<i>The Flagellation of St. Catherine</i>	202
1594-	{ <i>Last Supper</i> <i>Gathering of Manna</i> <i>Entombment</i> San Giorgio Maggiore	21, 51, 60, 107, 108, 202, 204 ff. (231)
		51, 58, 60, 202, 204 ff. (231)
		59, 95, 164, 202, 204 ff.





## INDEX

Figures in brackets refer to the Appendix.

- Accademia, 7, 41, 46, 49, 60, 73, 77,  
78, 84, 86, 87, 95, 104, 113, 130,  
163, 192, (221, 222, 227)
- Alberti, 10, 16
- Allori, Alessandro, (230)  
*Birth of Virgin*, (229)
- Altdorfer, 92  
*Battle of Alexander*, 92
- Alturia, see Robusti
- Aretino, Pietro, 8, 16, 41, 55, 56, 57,  
73, 76, 83, 120
- Ascension, Feast of, 113
- Augusta, Mario, 62
- Balza*, (221)
- Bardi, 201
- Baroccio, (230)
- Baroque, vi, viii, 37, 43, 44, 86, 89, 90,  
96, 132, 165, 189, 208, (217, 231)
- Basaiti, 6
- Bassano  
Family, 64, (215)  
Francesco, 197, 198, 201, (232)  
Jacopo  
*Return of Jacob*, 185  
*Preaching of St. Paul*, (226)
- Beaux Arts, Ecole des, (217, 230)
- Beerbohm, Sir Max  
*Rossetti and his Circle*, 69
- Beethoven, 60, 118, 205
- Bellini  
Jacopo, 64  
Gentile, 31, 113, 181  
Giovanni, 6, 18, 21, 27, 32, 46, 57,  
79, 132, 133, 139, 181, 186, 187,  
205, 209, 212
- Girl at her Toilet*, 79, 80  
*The Feast of the Gods*, 6, 79, 80,  
204
- Bercken and Meyer, v, 147, (220,  
223, 227), 234
- Bernardo, Girolamo, 83
- Bernini, Lorenzo, viii
- Bertelli, (220)
- Blake, 165
- Bon, Bartolomeo, 114
- Bonifazio, 10, 59, 133
- Borghini, 62  
*Riposo della Pittura e della Scultura*,  
144
- Boschini, Marco, 5, 88, 90, 159, 171,  
178, 209  
*Ricche Minere della Pittura Vene-  
ziana*, 35, 88
- Bottega*, Tintoretto's, 62, 63, 64
- Bottega* system, 9
- Botticelli, 20, 33, 40, 133, 152, (216)  
*Annunciation*, 153
- Boucher, 167
- Bozza, Bartolomeo, 196
- Brancacci Chapel, 78
- Brera, Milan, 50, 104, 106
- British Museum, 88
- Bronzino, viii, 8, 10, (222)
- Brouwer, 145
- Browning, 133
- Byzantine, 85, 86, 99, 180, 194, 205
- Caen, 95
- Caravaggio, 146, 172
- Carpaccio, 6, 18, 31, 32, 33, 68, 104,  
113, 114, 139, 148, 181

- Casser, Sebastian, 63, 64, 65  
 Cassoni, 26, 74, 75, (221, 222, 223, 228, 231)  
 Chartres Cathedral, 212  
 Chinese painting, 160  
 Christ Church, Oxford, 204  
 Churches in Venice  
   Gesuati, Church of the, 94, 149  
   Madonna dell'Orto, 17, 19, 22, 49, 60, 68, 83, 90, 96, 97, 99, 102, 129, 144, 167, 169, 200, 201, 204, 206, (217, 218, 223, 227)  
   Redentore, Church of the, 202  
   San Cassiano, 164  
   Santa Caterina, 202, (232)  
   San Giorgio Maggiore, 21, 51, 58, 59, 61, 95, 107, 108, 164, 202, 204, (231)  
   San Lazzaro dei Mendicanti, 75, 167, 171, (219, 223, 226, 227, 232, 233)  
   San Marcuola, 20, 22, 42, 74, 75, 107, 108, (222, 225)  
   Santa Margherita, 172  
   Santa Maria della Salute, 20, 49, 78, 102, 131, (218)  
   Santa Maria Formosa, 31  
   Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, 64, 114  
   Santa Maria Mater Domini, 55, 107  
   Santa Maria Zobenigo, 96, 97  
   St. Mark, Basilica of, 67, 104, 163, 164, 180, 194, 195, 205  
   San Marziale, 55, 76  
   San Polo, 22, 50, 51, 55, 107, 108, 109, 110, 132, 172  
   San Rocco, 68, 114, 122, 140 ff, 151, (218, 227)  
   San Silvestro, 162  
   San Simeone Grande, 108  
   San Stefano, 51, 58, 108, 172  
   San Trovaso, 22, 50, 58, 80, 107, 108, 110, 132, 166, 167  
   San Zaccaria, 89, (232)  
   Cigogna, Girolamo, 84  
   Cima, 6, 133  
   Clark, Sir Kenneth, 138  
   Claude, 148  
   Coletti, v, 57, 91, (223, 227, 228, 231), 234  
   Colonna Gallery, 80  
   Colonna, Prospero, 175  
   Constable, 48, 138, 148, 161, 210, 212  
   Contini Collection, Florence, 82, 197  
   Corpus Christi, Procession of, 113  
   Correggio, 131  
   Corsini Palace, Rome, (229)  
   Cortona, 66, (229)  
   Costume, viii, ix, (215 ff.)  
   Council of Ten, 77, 113, 114, 181, 182, 185  
   Counter Reformation, 110, 132, 147  
   Cristoforo Sorte of Verona, 191, 192  
   Crociferi, Confraternity of, 102  
   Dandolo, Andrea (Doge), 83  
   Dante, 199 (note)  
   Daumier, 134  
   Degas, 81, 82, 93, 210, 212  
   Delacroix, 15  
   dell'Abbate, (224)  
   Devonshire, Duke of, Collection (224)  
   Dolce  
     *Dialogo della Pittura*, 83  
   Domenico Tintoretto, see Robusti  
   Dresden, 74, 81, 92, 170, (225)  
   Ducal Palace, 23, 51, 53, 55, 59, 64, 65, 67, 89, 114, 131, 132, 163, 164, 168, 178, 180 ff, 197, 201, (225, 228, 229, 232, 233)  
   Sala delle Quattro Porte, 181, 183, 185  
   Sala dell'Anticollégio, vi, 23, 51, 56, 66, 80, 96, 183, 184, 185, 190, 210, (226, 227, 228)  
   Sala del Collegio, 183, 184, 190  
   Sala del Senato, 89, 181, 183, 184, 185, 191, (224)

- Sala degli Inquisitori di Stato, 181, 192  
 Sala del Maggior Consiglio, 89, 163, 181, 182, 183, 184, 187, 192, 193, 197, 198, 199, 201  
 Sala dello Scrutinio, 181, 182, 183, 185, 193  
 Salotto Quadrato, 181, 183, 185  
 Scala d'Oro, 181, 185  
 Duccio  
     *Temptation in the Maestà*, 134  
 Dürer, 102  
 Eclecticism, 9, 27  
 Elsheimer, 208  
 Epistles, St. Paul's, 125  
 Escorial, 75, (219)  
 Ferrara, 62  
 Fiocco, (225)  
 Florence, 83  
 Florentine drawings, 18  
 Florian, Antonio, 158  
 Fondaco dei Tedeschi, 73, 182  
 Fondamenta dei Mori, 64, 68, 99  
 Foscari, Alvise, 83, 84  
 Fra Angelico, 152, 153  
 Franceschi, Paolo  
     also called Paolo Fiammingo, 65, 66  
 Fumiani, 140, 143  
*Gamurra*, see *Guanacca*  
 Germany, 66  
 Ghirlandajo, 20  
 Giorgione, 6, 27, 31, 47, 73, 74, 76, 79, 90, 133, 160, 186, 187, 209, 212  
     *Fête Champêtre*, 76, 79  
     *Tempestà*, 31, 76, 160  
 Giotto, 15, 114, 124, 152, 213  
 Giovanni Battista Robusti, see Robusti  
 Giudecca, 202  
 Gonzaga family, 173 ff.  
     Gianfrancesco, first Marquis of Mantua, 174  
     Lodovico, second Marquis of Mantua, 174  
     Federigo, third Marquis of Mantua, 174  
     Francesco, fourth Marquis of Mantua, 173, 174, 176, 177  
     Federigo, first Duke of Mantua, 52, 175  
     Guglielmo, second Duke of Mantua, 172-179  
 Gonzagas, Palace of, 52, 173  
 Gospels, 132  
 Gothic, 180  
 Goya, vi, 212  
 Gozzi, Cristoforo de', 164, 165  
 Grand Canal, 61  
 Grassi, G. de', 19  
 Greco, El, 80, 106, 109, 137, 205, 209, 210  
 Greek Sculpture, 78  
*Guanacca*, (216, 217)  
 Guardian of the Scuola of San Rocco, 163  
 Guariento, 197  
 Hadeln, von, v, 73, 74, (220, 227), 234  
 'Haeredes Paoli', 64  
 Hall of Psyche, Mantua, 174  
 Hals, Franz, 109  
 Hampton Court, 170  
 Hellenic attitude, 78  
 Henry III of France, 53  
 Hermitage, 197  
 High Renaissance, vii, viii, 7, 9, 10, 20, 67, 77, 85, 99, 109, 135, 148, 160, 166, 208  
 Hogarth, 146  
 Holborn, I. D.  
     *Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto*, v, 234  
 Holland, 109, 147  
 Hollywood, 194  
 Humanism, 100, 160, 194

- Ingres, 212  
 Inquisition, 110, 132  
  
 Jesuits, 68, 110  
 Julius II, Pope, 5  
  
 Keats, John, 53  
 Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna,  
     63, 74, 75, 81, 167, (231)  
  
 Landscape painting, 80, 81  
 Laura Robusti, see Robusti  
 Laurenti, Tommaso  
     *Madonna and Saints*, (230)  
 Leger Collection, London, 73, (221)  
 Le Nain, 208  
 Leningrad, 197  
 Leonardo, 108, 109, 206  
     *Last Supper*, 119, 205  
 Lille Museum, 197  
 Longhi, Professor Roberto  
     *Viatico per Cinque Secoli di Pittura  
         Veneziana*, 208, 209, 210  
 Lorenzetti, Ambrogio, (216)  
 Lorenzetti, Professor G.  
     *Venezia e il Suo Estuario*, 143,  
     234  
 Lorenzi  
     *Monumenti per servire alla storia del  
         Palazzo Ducale*, 182, 234  
 Lorenzo the Magnificent, 5  
 Lotto, Lorenzo, 152  
 Louvre, 95, 103, 197, 198, 199, (229,  
     230, 232, 233)  
 Lovisa  
     *Gran Teatro delle Pitture e Prospettive  
         di Venezia*, 106, 234  
 Lubeck, 166  
 Luxembourg, Paris, 124  
  
 Magistrato del Sale, 77  
 Mannerists, v, vii, 5, 10, 28, 29, 78,  
     97, 208, 209, 211, (216)  
 Mantegna, 131, 173, 174, 210, 212  
*Mantello*, (216)  
  
 Mantua, 52, 53, 62, 66, 131, 173, 174,  
     176, 177, 178, 180  
 Marco Robusti, see Robusti  
 Marietta Robusti, see Robusti  
 Marostica, (226)  
 Martin, John, 106  
 Masaccio, 78, 79  
     *Tribute Money*, 78  
 Mastelli, Baldassare dei, 61  
 Medici family, 5  
 Médicis, Marie de, 125  
 Merceria, Venice, 56  
 Mestre, 68  
 Michelangelo, 5, 6, 10, 16, 29, 30, 33,  
     36, 37, 43, 44, 48, 49, 67, 68, 73,  
     78, 79, 80, 100, 109, 124, 131, 159,  
     (215, 216)  
     Medici Tombs, 29, 32  
     Sistine Chapel, 5, 6, 7, 24, 29, 30,  
     31, 99, 124, 131  
     *Last Judgment*, viii, 5, 100  
 Milan, 175, 176  
 Milledonne, Antonio, 166  
 Mocenigo, Alvise (Doge), 185  
 Modena Gallery, 83  
 Molino, Jacopo, 73  
 Monaco, Lorenzo, 32  
 Montagna, 6  
 Montpelier, 116  
 Moore, Henry, vii, 86  
 Moro, Paulo, 173, 174, 175, 176  
 Mosaic cartoons, 67, 163, 164, 166,  
     194 ff.  
 Mosaics, 85, 104  
 Mostra catalogue, (231)  
 Munich, (Alte Pinakothek), 92, 167,  
     168, 172, (229, 230, 231, 232)  
  
 National Gallery, vi, 57, 66, 73, 92,  
     96, 167, 168  
 Newcastle Cathedral, 75  
 New Testament, 68, 109, 124, 125,  
     127, 130  
  
*Odyssey*, 118, 119



- Old Testament, 68, 74, 124, 125, 130,  
171, 200, 210
- Orvieto, 188
- Osmaston  
*The Art and Genius of Tintoret*, v,  
234
- Ostade, Adriaen van, 145
- Ottavia Robusti, see Robusti
- Padua, 62
- Palazzo del Te, Mantua, 174
- Palazzo Soranzo, 74
- Palladio, Andrea, 185, 204
- Palluchini, Professor Ridolfo, v,  
(223, 228), 234
- Palma Giovane, 182, 186, 190, 193,  
196, 197, 198
- Palma Vecchio, 31, 33, 79, 167, 187,  
(216)  
*Santa Barbara*, 31
- Panels, The Madrid, (228 ff.)
- Parma, 131, 175, 176
- Parmigiano, viii, 10, 27, 107, (216,  
228, 229)
- Parthenon, 212
- Pearce, Stella Mary, viii, (215)
- Perugino, 24
- Pescara, Marquis of, 175
- Philip II of Spain, 62, 177
- Phillips, E. M.  
*Tintoretto*, v, 234
- Pianta, Francesco, 69
- Picasso, 162  
*piccole case*, 20 ff., 88
- Pierina Robusti, see Robusti
- Piero della Francesca, vii, 33, 133,  
136, 209
- Piero di Cosimo, 160
- Pinakothek catalogue, Munich, (213)
- Pino, Paolo  
*Dialogo di Pittura*, 8, 9, 10, 33
- Pisanello, 19, 173, 174
- Pittaluga, Mary, v, 120 note, (220,  
221, 223, 224, 227, 231), 234
- Ponte, Antonio da (Doge), 191
- Pope Leo X, 176
- Pordenone, viii, 10, 59, 140, 142,  
143, 149, 150
- Poussin, Gaspar, 160
- Prado, 91, 171, 197
- Praxiteles, 212
- Pre-Raphaelites, 69, 82
- Priuli, Girolamo (Doge), 181, 185
- Procuratie, Venice, 89, 163, 166
- Rangone, Tommaso, 104, 105, 107,  
169, 191
- Raphael, 5, 24, 28, 31, 43, 58, 135,  
159, 162, 173, (216)  
*Deliverance of St. Peter*, 21  
*Expulsion of Heliodorus*, 156  
*Parnassus*, 30, 156, 157  
*Sistine Madonna*, 119, 162  
*Transfiguration*, 5  
Vatican frescoes, 45
- Ravenna, 104, 169
- Rembrandt, vi, 36, 37, 44, 46, 47,  
48, 53, 109, 110, 145, 146, 147, 159,  
209, 210
- Renaissance, 39, 78, 79, 86, 110, 135,  
136, 160, 173, 180, 186, 194, 199,  
205, (225)
- Renier, Andrea, 84
- Rennes, (231)
- Renoir, 46, 80, 132, 202
- Republic, Venetian, 53, 67, 112, 163,  
164, 180, 187, 191, 192, 194, 201
- Ridolfi, Carlo, v, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15,  
16, 17, 20, 22, 23, 25, 35, 44, 47,  
52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 65, 69,  
74, 75, 78, 99, 128, 143, 149, 181,  
182, 185, 197, 198, 201, 234
- Rizzo, Antonio, 180
- Robusti  
Jacopo (Tintoretto):  
parents, 12; birth, 12; marriage;  
61; family, 62 ff.; visit to Man-  
tua, 30, 52, 53, 177; living in  
Campo San Cassiano, 55; living  
in parish of St. Marcilian, 61;

Robusti—*contd.*

living on the Fondamenta dei Mori, 68; divisions of life, 60, 61; administration of Scuola, 67; Will, 65; death, 55, 124, 206 apprenticeship, 11, 66 artificial lighting experiments, 20 ff.  
 attitude to Christianity, 67, 68 character, 52, 54 composition, system of, 84, 86, 89, 97, 168, 169 conception of space, 40 ff. dating of pictures, 58, (215 ff.) drawings, 19, 87, 88, 89 handwriting in painting and drawing, 57, 74, 173, 183 interest in fresco painting, 25, 55, 73, 74 love of music, 55 methods of work, 13, 15, 17, 20, 22, 35, 37, 88, 93 motto, 9, 29 ff, 35 paintings, see Paintings referred to in the Text, 235 ff Pianta's caricature, 69 portraits by, vi, 56, 89, 93, 163, 166 Schiavone's shop, 26, 74 self confidence, 132 Venetian patriotism, 66, 67 workshop, 65, 66  
 Giovanni Battista (Jacopo's father), 12  
 Domenico (Jacopo's brother), 12  
 Faustina de Vescovi, 54, 61, 62, 65, 68, 81, 82, 182  
 Marietta, 62, 65, 66, (227)  
 Giovanni Battista, 62  
 Domenico (Domenico Tintoretto), 11, 13, 54, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 88, 90, 104, 168, 204  
 Pierina, 62, 63  
 Marco, 54, 62, 63, 65, 66, 204  
 Ottavia, 19, 63, 64

Laura, 63  
 Alturia, 63  
 Rodin, 30  
 Romano, Giulio, 173, 177  
 Rome, 52, 66, 80, 173, (229)  
 Rosa, Salvator, 160  
 Rossetti, 81  
 Rottenhamer, Hans, 65  
 Rubens, viii, 24, 36, 37, 44, 46, 47, 48, 66, 80, 96, 111, 124, 159, 192, 208, 210, 212  
 Ruskin, J., v, vii, 5, 99, 102, 119, 135, 154, 160, 162, 200  
*Modern Painters*, v, 99, 153, 234  
*Stones of Venice*, v, 102, 119, 234  
 Salviati, Giuseppe, 115, 117, 149  
 Sangiorgio, Count, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179  
 Sansovino, Francesco, 67, 195  
*Venezia, città nobilissima*, 186  
 Schiavone, Andrea, 26, 27, 59, 74, 157  
 Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, 114, 124  
 Scuole, Venetian, 112-114  
 Scuola of St. George of the Slavonians, 114  
 Scuola of San Giovanni Evangelista, 113, 114  
 Scuola of San Marco, 36, 76, 104, 169, 191  
 Scuola della Misericordia, 201  
 Scuola of San Rocco, v, vi, 22, 50, 53, 56, 59, 60, 66, 67, 68, 69, 84, 89, 93, 95, 101, 108, 114, 122, 123 ff, 131, 138, 141, 145, 149, 151 ff, 163, 164, 165, 166, 172, 184, 186, 201, 205, 210, (225, 226)  
 Scuola Del SS. Sacramento, 107  
 Scuola della Trinità, 46, 47, 77, 78, 80, 109, 189  
 Scuola of St. Ursula, 114  
 Serlio, Sebastian, 107  
 Seurat, 165

- Shakespeare, 53, 118, 147  
*Lear*, 118, 138
- Signorelli, 30, 159, 188
- Simone, Martini, 32, 152, 154
- Steen, Jan, 109
- Thode, v, (221, 231), 234
- Tiepolo, 131, 169, 190
- Tietze, 74, 147, (220, 223, 224, 227, 228, 231)  
*Drawings of the Venetian Painters*, 88, 120 note, (231)  
*Tintoretto*, v, 234
- Tintoretto, see Robusti
- Titian, vi, 4, 6, 7, 11, 21, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 41, 43, 48, 53, 57, 58, 59, 64, 66, 67, 68, 74, 78, 79, 80, 82, 83, 90, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 107, 110, 132, 133, 139, 153, 155, 156, 157, 158, 167, 173, 181, 182, 186, 187, 188, 189, 195, 205, 208, 209, 210, 212, (216)  
*Annunciation*, 155  
*Assumption*, 64  
*Bacchus and Ariadne*, 34  
*Battle of Cadore*, 41  
*Death of Abel*, 78  
*Deliverance of St. Peter*, 21  
*Drawings*, 18  
*Ecce Homo*, 41  
*Eleanora Gonzaga*, (224)  
*Entombment*, 95  
*Pietà*, 7, 204  
*Presentation of the Virgin*, 41, 98, (222)  
*St. John the Baptist*, 41  
*Venus and the Organ Player*, 7  
*Visitation*, 155
- Tolstoi  
*War and Peace*, 118
- Torcello, Cathedral of, 83, 99
- Turner, 58, 148, 161
- Uffizi, 83, 84, 153, 192, (230)
- Ulerick, Peter, 65
- Urbino, 66
- Vandevelde, 148
- Van Dyck, 24
- Van Eyck, 20  
*Miracle of the Holy Lamb*, 212
- Van Gogh, 210
- Vasari, viii, 8, 10, 16, 17, 18, 55, 96, 98, 99, 100, 101, 115, 142, 143, 169, (216), 234
- Vecellio, (220, 228, 229)
- Velasquez, 146, 171
- Venetian drawings, 18
- Venetian High Renaissance, 7
- Venier, Giorgio, 83
- Venturi, Adolfo, (227)
- Vergil's *Georgics*, 60
- Veronese, Paolo, 32, 33, 36, 46, 57, 59, 64, 67, 74, 86, 91, 102, 103, 104, 110, 115, 139, 145, 149, 162, 181, 184, 186, 190, 193, 195, 197, 198, 201, 210, (215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 225, 230)  
*Apotheosis of Venice*, 131, 184  
*Coronation of the Virgin*, (227)  
*Emmaus*, 103  
*Esther*, (230)  
*Feast in Levi's House*, 104  
*Marriage at Cana*, 103  
*Rape of Europa*, 185  
*Santa Giustina*, (224, 225)
- Vescovi chapel, Madonna dell'Orto, Venice, 97, 206
- Vescovi, Marco dei, 68
- Viennese State Collection,  
 see Kunsthistorisches Museum
- Villa di Camenzaga, 68
- Villa di Campanedo, 68
- Vincentino, Andrea, 182, 193
- Vivarini family, 64
- Vivarini, Alvise, 6, 181
- Volterra, Daniele da, 16, 32
- Vos, Martin de, 65

Wagner, 60  
Watteau, 19, 46, 132, 148  
Whistler, 128  
  
Zanetti, 73  
Zattere, 94

## INDEX

Zelarino, 68  
Zibramonte, 177  
Zuccaro family, 64  
Zuccaro  
    Bernardo, 209, (229)  
    Taddeo, 115



## PLATES





1 Apollo and Marsyas

*Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut*



2 The Last Supper

*Church of San Marcuola, Venice*

3 The Miracle of the  
Slave



*Accademia, Venice*







5 The Temptation of Adam

*Accademia, Venice*



6 Susanna and the Elders

*Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna*





7 Venus and Vulcan

*Pinakothek, Munich*



8 Sketch for Venus and Vulcan

*Neues Museum, Wiesbaden*



9 The Adoration of the Magi (detail)

*Scuola of San Rocco*



10 Drawing by Henry Moore





11 The Crucifixion (detail)

*Scuola of San Rocco*



12 Twelfth Century Mosaics (detail)

*Basilica of San Marco, Venice*



13 The Massacre of the Innocents (detail) Scuola of San Rocco



14 The Miracle of the Slave (detail) Accademia, Venice





15 The Deposition

*Accademia, Venice*









18 The Last Judgment (*lower half*)

*Madonna dell'Orto, Venice*





19 The Worship of the Golden Calf (*lower half*)

*Madonna dell'Orto, Venice*



20 Finding the Body of St. Mark

*Brera, Milan*





21 Removal of the Body of St. Mark

*Accademia, Venice*



22 The Last Supper

*Church of San Trovaso, Venice*



23 The Last Supper

*Church of San Polo, Venice*





24 The Crucifixion (detail)

*Scuola of San Rocco*



25 The Crucifixion (detail)

*Scuola of San Rocco*



26 The Crucifixion

*Scuola of San Rocco*







28 The Temptation of Adam

*Ceiling of Upper Hall, Scuola of San Rocco*



29 San Rocco in Glory

*Ceiling of the Albergo, Scuola of San Rocco, Venice*





30 The Baptism (detail)

*Scuola of San Rocco*



31 The Gathering of Manna (detail)

*San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice*









34 San Rocco Visiting the Plague-stricken in Hospital

*Church of San Rocco*





35 San Rocco Comforted by an Angel in Prison

*Church of San Rocco*









38 The Baptism

*Scuola of San Rocco*











41 The Flight Into Egypt



*Church of San Rocco*







44 The Temptation of St. Anthony *Church of San Trovaso, Venice*





45 Christ in the House of Martha and Mary

*Pinakothek, Munich*



46 St. Ursula and the Virgins

*Church of San Lazzaro, Venice*





47 The Miracle of St. Agnes

*Madonna dell'Orto, Venice*



48 The Origin of the Milky Way

*National Gallery, London*







50 The Finding of Moses (*Panel*)

*Prado, Madrid*



51 The Nine Muses

*Hampton Court, London*





52 The Last Supper (detail)

*San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice*



53 The Last Supper (detail)

*San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice*



54 The Forge of Vulcan

*Ducal Palace, Venice*



55 Bacchus and Ariadne

*Ducal Palace, Venice*





56 The Three Graces

*David Palazzi, Venice*



57 Venus, Mars and Minerva

*David Palazzi, Venice*



58 The Emperor creating Gian Francesco Gonzaga first Marquis of Mantua









60 The Battle of Zara (detail)

*Ducal Palace, Venice*



61 Paradiso (Detail of mosaic in San Marco, Venice)



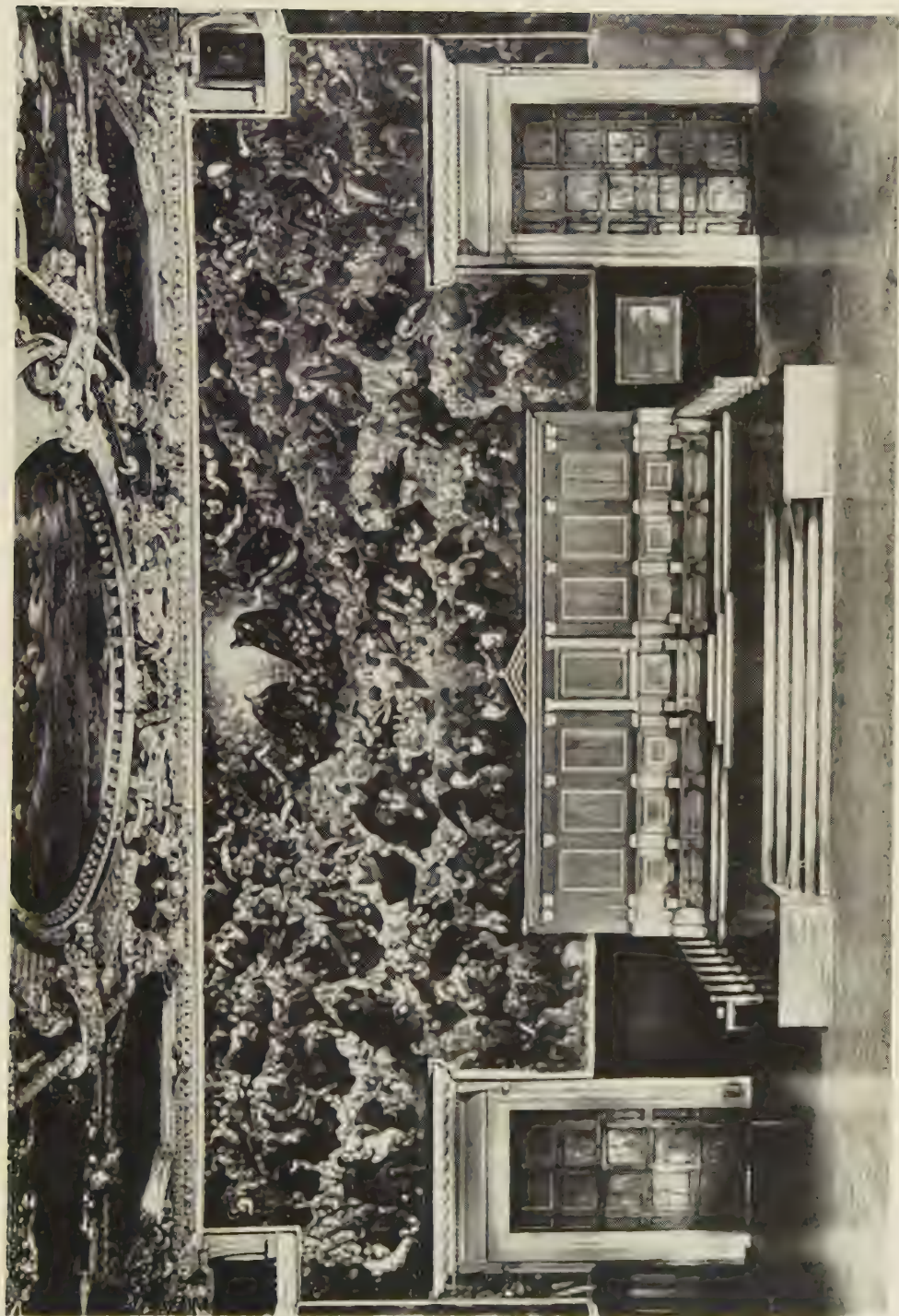




63 Sketch for Paradise

*Louvre, Paris*







65 *Paradiso (detail)*

*Ducal Palace, Venice*



66 *Paradiso (detail)*

*Ducal Palace, Venice*





67 The Capture of St. Catherine

*Accademia, Venice*



68 St. Catherine and the Wheels

*Accademia, Venice*



69 The Last Supper

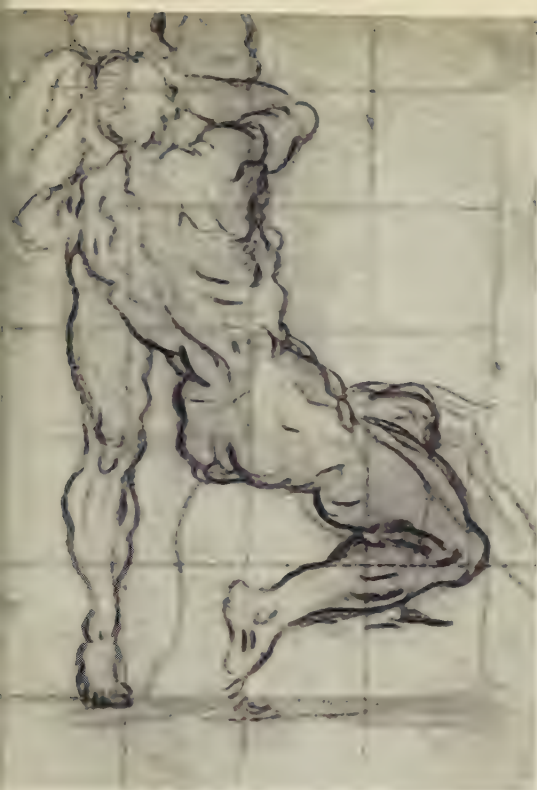
*San Giorgio Maegan, Venice*







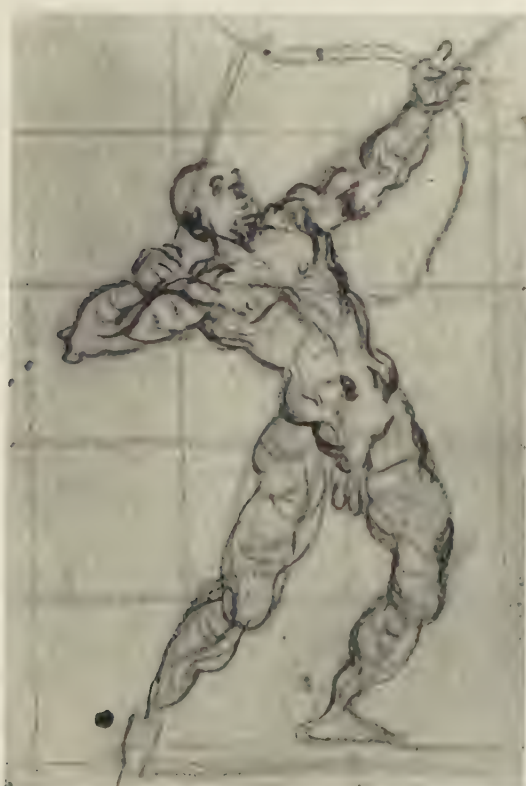




72 Drawing for The Worship of the Golden Calf



73 Male Figure in Action



74 Drawing for The Battle of Zara

Three Charcoal  
Drawings

*Uffizi Gallery, Florence*











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